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## HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

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THE TEACH YOURSELF BOOKS

# HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

By

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## PREFACE

TODAY there is a widespread interest in the history and comparative study of religions for a variety of reasons and purposes, and from different points of view and lines of approach. The initial problem, however, that confronts those who have never studied the subject, or who are anxious to become better acquainted with the discipline, either as students reading for an examination in which it is part of the curriculum, or as general readers, is how to begin the task. Now it must be said straightaway that the days are past when anyone can expect to cover expertly so wide a field. Nevertheless, before a special study is made of a particular part of it, it is a great advantage to secure an overall view of the whole lay-out of the territory. When this has been acquired, then is the time to concentrate attention upon a smaller portion for intensive and detailed investigation. Furthermore, in an age like this of excessive specialization when experts tend to know more and more about less and less, even the specialist may sometimes with profit pause a moment to become better acquainted with what has been done, and is being done, in related fields of study.

Finally, as regards the general reader, his main object may well be to gain an all-round knowledge and a reasonably clear picture of a very big subject that has loomed large on the human horizon throughout the long and checkered history of mankind. In short, to see how the various bits and pieces of what may seem to be a jigsaw puzzle can be fitted together. Reasons such as these, I think, after a long experience of university teaching and independent inquiry in the subject, justify a book of this character as an introduction to a deeper and more detailed study which may then be carried a stage farther with the aid of the books for further reading mentioned in the bibliographies at the end of each of the chapters.

FOR permission to reproduce the illustrations which appeared in an earlier book of mine entitled "The Stone Age"

I am indebted to the Sheldon Press (S.P.C.K.), and for the rest as follows.—Fig. 5 to the Prehistoric Society; Fig. 7 to Messrs. Sampson, Low and Marston; Figs. 8 and 9 to The Trustees of the British Museum; Figs. 12 and 13 to the Archaeological Survey of India; Fig. 15 to Mr. Arthur Probsthain; Fig. 17 to Messrs. Macmillan and Co. and the Executors of the late Sir Arthur Evans; Fig. 16 to Fr. Vincent Ryan O. P. of the Collegio San Clemente, Rome, and Signor Richter; and Fig. 19 to Messrs. Faber and Faber Ltd., Fig. 14 is from “The Land of Gold Moher” by Lady Lowther, published by Philip Allan, and Figs 10 and 11 from “Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection” by Sir W. Budge, published by Messrs. Philip Lee Warner.

*Oxford.*

E. O. JAMES.

## CHAPTER I

### HOW RELIGION BEGAN

SINCE religion in some shape or form appears to be almost as old as the human race itself, the proper starting-point of any attempt to understand the history of the religions of the world, both ancient and modern, is at the beginning of man's spiritual quest. Here, however, we are faced with the initial difficulty that besets every inquiry into the origins of human institutions, social, economic, cultural, ethical as well as religious, arising out of the lack of knowledge and evidence. We just do not know, and we have no means of finding out, exactly when, where and how the various traits of what we call collectively "culture" came into being, and precisely what form they took. In the case of a spiritual discipline like religion it is only those aspects which have become embodied in concrete form, such as the graves of the dead, sanctuaries and temples, cult objects, sculpture, bas-reliefs, engravings and paintings that have survived the ravages of time, which give us some idea of how religion began, prior to the writing of sacred texts and the keeping of ancient records.

Attempts have been made in recent years to supplement this archaeological evidence by analogies drawn from existing peoples who have lived on the fringes of civilization in Australia, Tasmania, Africa, India, Indonesia and the islands of the Pacific Ocean, under conditions similar to those which are believed to have prevailed when man everywhere was in a Stone Age state of culture. Here, however, great care is needed, because these so-called "primitive" folk have a very long and sometimes complicated history behind them. Consequently, a good deal of the speculation about the origin and development of religion, and of social institutions, which was rife in the latter part of the last century, based on a theory of "survivals" of previous conditions, has now been shown to have been very wide



of the mark. Such a monumental work as Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, for example, although it will always remain a mine of information collected with extreme care and accuracy and written in fine prose, has to be read with caution, especially by beginners in the subject, where its theoretical conjectures are concerned.

### Magic and Religion

Thus, starting from Hegel's unwarranted assumption that an "age of magic" preceded an "age of religion", Frazer supposed that a time existed when men thought that they could control the processes of nature directly by the force of spells and enchantments. When this method failed to produce the desired effects they appealed to supernatural beings superior to themselves—spirits, gods or deified ancestors—to do for them what they could not secure by their own magical devices. Therefore, an hypothetical "age of magic" was supposed to pass into an "age of religion", the medicine-man, or magician, giving place to the priest as the persuasive methods of sacrifice and prayer were substituted for the dictatorial incantations of the earlier magic art.

This simple evolutionary scheme, however, is not verified by the evidence. So far from religion having arisen out of the failure of the magician to exercise his functions successfully, in every known community, ancient or modern, the two disciplines occur side by side, and are so inextricably interwoven that the one cannot have been the predecessor and the root of the other. The distinction between magic and religion is not chronological. That is to say, magic is not earlier in time than religion, since the two approaches to the supernatural order appear always to have co-existed. The difference between them is in the nature and function of the respective system of ideas and practices. Magic depends upon the way in which certain things are said and done for a particular purpose by those who have the necessary knowledge and power to put the supernatural force into effect. It is tied to its own rites and formulae, and limited by its specific tradition. Whereas religion presupposes the existence of spiritual beings

external to man and the world who control mundane affairs, magic is enshrined in man and in the techniques he employs in accordance with the strict rules of magical procedure. While religion is personal and supplicatory, magic is coercive, constraining the mysterious forces of the universe by its own mechanical manipulations flawlessly performed. But since both disciplines are concerned with mysterious supernatural power residing either in a transcendent order of reality standing over and against yet distinct from but controlling the world, or, conversely, in prescribed techniques charged with special potency, they naturally tend to coincide in practice, however distinct they may be in theory.

Now it is undoubtedly true that primitive folk believe that things which resemble each other have similar properties and powers. We distinguish between a portrait and the person represented by the artist, but minds untrained in analytical thinking imagine that somehow they are both parts of the same individual. Therefore, if you act on one you produce a like result on the other. Hence the rooted objection to and fear of being photographed prevalent among simple people lest evil magic should be wrought upon them through their portraits. The widespread use of amulets and charms, and the disposition of blood or its surrogate red ochre, from prehistoric times to the present day, as will be considered directly, derive their efficacy from their inherent sacred potency, but they also may be the embodiment of sacredness with which they have been endowed by divine beings. Therefore, under these conditions it is not easy to draw a hard-and-fast line between magic and religion in practice because a religious attitude is often adopted towards objects and actions which, taken by themselves, and separated from their ritual contexts, would be regarded as magical.

Primitive man, both ancient and modern, always has "danced out his religion" and manipulated his magic without analysing his actions or theorizing about his methods. That they "work" is his main concern, and so long as this end is secured, to what particular supernatural category they belong is a matter about which he could

hardly care less. For us, in trying to understand and interpret the way he behaves, we must avoid thinking in terms of "ages" of magic and religion and science, or, indeed, of any clearly defined classifications. Therefore, beliefs and practices which occupy a border-line position, as so many do, may be described as "magico-religious". This is a cumbersome and question-begging term, but it has the merit of saving confusion of thought and of avoiding the mistakes of Frazer and other theorists who have been too neat and tidy in working out schemes of development.

When a medicine-man, or sorcerer, resorts to spells and charms to heal his patient or injure his victim, to arouse love or hate, to bring rain, promote fertility or secure good hunting, fishing or a plentiful harvest, he may be described as a magician. But, on the other hand, he may owe his supernormal power to spirits or gods with whom he is *en rapport* and then, like Balaam, he may be able to do nothing of himself except it be given him by the higher powers. The rain-maker, the seer, the diviner or the spirit-medium, who acts as the official representative of transcendental beings or is regarded as a sacred or semi-divine person, may not exercise priestly functions as the master of sacrifice, but, nevertheless, he stands in the religious rather than the magical tradition. Similarly, the shaman or seer, who dances or drums himself into an ecstasy to gain supernatural knowledge and wisdom, is well on his way to the prophetic office. Unlike the priest, in whom sacred power is fixed by virtue of his ordination which has conferred a certain "character" upon him as a permanent endowment, the shaman or prophet is usually only sporadically "god-possessed", as in the case of Saul in Israel on his return from his search for the asses (1 Sam. x. 10, ix). But so long as he is in this highly emotional state he acts as the mouthpiece of the spirit-world, even though his inspired utterances may not always be any more intelligible than were those in the Early Church (1 Cor. xiv. 21-40) who in apostolic times "spoke with tongues" at Corinth.

It is clear, therefore, that so far from the priest being the lineal descendant of the magician, as Frazer suggested, and religion the sequel of ineffective magic, incantations and

prayers, enchantments and supplications, coercion and oblation, ecstatic ravings and prophetic utterance are so intermingled in bewildering confusion that an observer is at a loss to know how to classify a complex rite or its officiants. The most that can be said is that if it is an act of worship performed with reverential awe—or, as Otto would say, in a “numinous” manner, producing a sense of wonder and abasement in the presence of the sacred (cf. *The Idea of the Holy* (1928), pp. 7, 15)—then it should be regarded as a religious observance rather than as a magical operation, and those taking part in it as priests or worshippers. Isolated from the general setting, some of the elements may appear to be essentially magical, but collectively they constitute a religious action. It is when these conditions obtain that the description “magico-religious” is appropriate. If this is more apparent in the preliterate state of culture, it is by no means confined to primitive and prehistoric society. From the lowest and earliest to the highest and latest expressions of man’s spiritual quest it is, in fact, a recurrent feature in the history of religion.

### Animistic Spirits

When we pass from these two generalized approaches to the sacred—the one religious and the other magical—to the more specific beliefs about the nature and function of the divine order, we find a similar fluid state out of which in due course clear and distinct concepts have emerged in the form of spirits, gods, ancestors, divine kings, totems and supreme beings. Here again we have to be on our guard against neat and tidy evolutionary sequences and simplifications so dear to the heart of the theorizers at the end of the last century. Thus, one of the greatest pioneers in the study of social anthropology, Sir E. B. Tylor (1832–1917), who on the whole was much more cautious and critical than most of his contemporaries, in his great book *Primitive Culture* (which was first published in 1871) rested the entire structure of the history of religion on “Animism”, as he called the belief in “spiritual beings”. This for him was “the minimum definition of religion”—the ultimate source from which everything else in due course had developed.

From mistaken inferences, from observation of such phenomena as dreams, trances, visions, disease and death transferred to the natural order, the sun, stars, trees, rivers, winds and clouds, he maintained, became animated by a soul or spirit, and performed their special functions in the universe like men or animals. Thus, he peopled the world with a multitude of individual spirits which, in the words of his disciple Sir James Frazer, were located in "every nook and hill, every tree and flower, every brook and river, every breeze that blew and every cloud that flecked with silvery white the blue expanse of heaven". Eventually from these innumerable spirits a polytheistic system of gods emerged believed to control the various departments of nature. "Instead of a separate spirit for every individual tree, they came to conceive of a god of the woods in general, a Silvanus or what not; instead of personifying all the winds as gods, each with his distinct character and features, they imagined a single god of the winds, an Aeolus, for example, who kept them shut up in bags and could let them out at pleasure to lash the sea into fury." By a further generalization and abstraction "the instinctive craving of the mind after simplification and unification of its ideas" caused the many localized and departmentalized gods to be deposed in favour of one supreme creator and controller of all things. Thus, as polytheism evolved out of animism, so polytheism in its turn passed into monotheism, the belief in a single sovereign Lord of heaven and earth (cf. Frazer, *The Worship of Nature* (1926), p. 9 f.).

### The Worship of Ancestors

On the same animistic basis Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who had a great influence on the thought of the second half of the last century, rested his ghost theory of the origin of the idea of God, and of religion in general. In an attempt to find "the root of every religion" in the worship of ancestors, he revived a theory first set forth by the Greek romantic writer Euhemeros (320-260 B.C.). This ancient author had tried to prove that all the Greek gods, like Zeus and his companions who lived together on Mount Olympus in Thessaly in the manner of the old invading Northern

chieftains, were simply rulers and benefactors of mankind, who had won the gratitude of their subjects, and after their death they had been raised to divine rank in heaven as immortals, classed with the sun and the moon and the stars, the corn and the wine, all of which had been deified. So Herbert Spencer maintained that the origin and development of the concept of Deity was the result of the propitiation, worship and deification of the illustrious dead. Having been regarded with awe and reverence during their lifetime, after their death their ghosts were venerated and propitiated until around them an established worship developed.

### Supreme Beings

Now all this speculation was in line with the evolutionary thought of the period in which it arose, and a good deal of it has survived in the popular mind and literature today. It soon became apparent to expert opinion, however, that it was too specialized and intellectualized an approach to explain adequately the origin and history of religion. Moreover, as evidence accumulated, it became impossible to fit the facts into these theoretical schemes and sequences, be they Tylorian, Frazerian or Spencerian. Thus, at the end of the century, Andrew Lang, a versatile man of letters from north of the border, was able to show that so far from deities improving in dignity and supremacy with advancing civilization, "High Gods" existed among "low races". This he insisted, and not without reason, disposed of the theory of a unilineal development from animism through polytheism to monotheism, or from illustrious mortals to deified immortals. In his book entitled *The Making of Religion*, Lang in 1898 called attention to a number of Supreme Beings among such very primitive people as, for instance, the Australian aborigines, who, as he showed, were neither spirits nor ghosts, ancestors nor departmental gods carried to the highest power. Rather were they, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, "magnified non-natural men". While usually they have tended to stand aloof from everyday affairs, they are the personifications and guardians of the tribal ethic. It was they who gave the people their laws and

instituted the initiation rites for the purpose of inculcating right conduct in society, the rules of which have been handed down from generation to generation in these solemn assemblies over which the High God presides.

This unique and remote figure stands in sublime majesty as the highest expression of supernatural power and will, primeval and benevolent, the giver and guardian of the good and the right, the supreme originator and upholder of the laws and customs whereby society is maintained as an orderly and ordered whole. So lofty, in fact, is the concept of the tribal All-Father that at first it was dismissed as having been imported by Christian missionaries or other foreigners acquainted with the higher conceptions of Deity. It has now been established, however, that Andrew Lang was perfectly right in his contention that the belief in High Gods among low races is a genuine and characteristic feature of uncontaminated primitive religion recurrent among such aboriginal people as the Australians, the Fuegians in South America, the Californian tribes in North America, and certain negritoes and other negroids in Africa and elsewhere. In all these widely separated groups, over and above animistic spirits, deified heroes and departmental gods the Supreme Being, or tribal All-Father, is thought to have existed before death came into the world, and having made himself he lived on the earth, could "go anywhere and do anything". After a time, for one reason or another, he retired to the seclusion of the sky where he has lived ever since as the Great Chief, usually remote and disinterested in human affairs, except on rare occasions, such as during initiation ceremonies, when he becomes the God of the Mysteries.

While Pater Wilhelm Schmidt is hardly justified in interpreting this belief as a true monotheism, still less as a primeval revelation of God comparable to that set forth in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis in the Old Testament by the later Jewish writers, it certainly cannot be explained as the final product of an evolutionary process along the lines suggested for the development of monotheism by Tylor and Frazer. Whatever may have been the origin of the concept, these primitive High Gods do in fact

stand alone, head and shoulders above all secondary divinities, though not to the exclusion of the lesser spiritual beings. On the contrary, it is to the lesser spirits, totems, culture heroes and localized gods who control natural processes like the weather that popular worship is directed, while the Supreme Being tends to be left high and dry in lofty celestial seclusion as the "One Above". Indeed, he may become so shadowy and otiose as to be little more than a name, or sometimes a personification of the sacred bull-roarer, the thunderous booming of which is regarded as his voice, especially by women and the uninitiated children.

Again, it has to be remembered that it is only within the very limited capacity of the primitive mind that the higher attributes of the gods are conceived. Thus, when they are said to have existed before death came into the world, this does not presuppose any idea of time which admits of eternity as its corollary. Similarly, the belief that they can go anywhere and do anything may merely mean that they have powers comparable to those of a great medicine-man or chief, just as their creative activities are much the same as those exercised by rain-makers and other initiators and fabricators in tribal society. If they gave man his laws and rules of conduct, having left the world they have generally dissociated themselves from the social ethic, except in an aloof manner at the admission of adolescents to the tribal fellowship. Therefore, abstract concepts such as eternity, omnipotence, creative power and ethical righteousness can hardly be assigned to them in our sense of these terms, which really have no equivalents in the native idiom.

Having given this word of warning against reading loftier ideas and interpretations into this High-God belief than it can sustain, nevertheless, it certainly does seem to represent the highest expression of divine transcendence the primitive mind has conceived in terms of supernatural power and will. Furthermore, Supreme Beings are personifications of the moral order, primal and beneficent. They are the givers and guardians of the right and the good, the originators and upholders of the laws whereby society is maintained as an orderly whole. Wherever they exist, invariably they are on a plane by themselves, equipped with greater power



than the rest of the pantheon of lesser divinities and spirits. Moreover, they represent the ultimate moral value of the universe so far as the primitive mind can conceive such an absolute reality.

Thus, Professor Evans-Pritchard tells us that among the Nuer, a Nilotic people in East Africa, God is regarded as a being of pure spirit, and because he is like wind or air "he is everywhere and being everywhere he is here now". He is, in short, what we should describe as transcendent and immanent. He is far away in the sky yet present on the earth which he created and sustains. "Everything in nature, in culture, in society and in man is as it is because God made it so." Although he is ubiquitous and invisible, he sees and hears all that happens and, being responsive to the supplications of those who call upon him, prayers are addressed to him and sacrifices offered to avoid misfortunes. Since God can be angry he can and does punish wrong-doing, and suffering is accepted with resignation because it is his will, and therefore beyond human control. But the consequences of wrong-doing can be stayed or mitigated by contrition and reparation, prayer and sacrifice.

Such a conception of Deity, which is indistinguishable from genuine monotheism, is a religious awareness of a divine Providence more fundamental than any gradual development from plurality to unity. In the first instance, worship invariably depends upon the recognition of supernatural power and efficacy, and an object of worship need not necessarily have a "soul" or "spirit" attributed to it, or involve the idea of causation. Therefore, the religious response to the sense of awe and wonder in the presence of the inexplicable, unpredictable and mysterious—in short, of transcendental sacredness—is independent of any particular conceptual explanation in relation to spirits, gods or causes.

### **Mana and the Numinous**

Thus, for example, in the Melanesian Islands in the Pacific Ocean any object, person or event behaving in an unusual manner, for either good or ill, is thought to be endowed with the power of the sacred or transcendental

order. This sacredness is called *mana* and is regarded as a supernatural influence which shows itself in physical force, or in any kind of power or excellence which a man possesses (e.g. strength, intelligence, authority and outstanding ability), or through the medium of water, a stone or a bone, and in any unusual event. Similarly, among the North American Indians the activities in nature have been interpreted in the same way under the term *orenda* associated with will and intelligence comparable to what is also called *wakonda*, or "the power that moves". Sometimes, however, it is transformed into the conception of a more or less personal god, as in the case of the idea of *manitu*. In Morocco, sacredness is called *baraka*, regarded as an indwelling supernatural principle, while among the ancient Latin farmers in Italy, powers associated with particular places or functions were known as *numina*.

It was this last-mentioned term, "numen", which Dr. Otto recently adopted to describe sacredness in the sense of non-moral holiness as a category of value and a state of mind and of spiritual experience peculiar to religion. As he uses the word, the *numinous* is not quite the same as *mana*, or *orenda*, or *baraka*, because it is, he maintains, a unique mental condition peculiar to religious awareness, and comparable to the cardinal values, goodness, beauty and truth, whereas *mana*, as it has come to be used by anthropologists, rightly or wrongly (whatever may be its precise meaning in Melanesia) is a general name for the power attributed to sacred persons and things whether it be within the discipline of religion or of magic. Thus, it was a numinous reaction which Jacob is said to have experienced when he spent the night at Bethel in an ancient megalithic sanctuary, rather like Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain. There he had a soul-stirring dream from which he awoke conscious of daemonic dread in the presence of transcendent sacredness. "How dreadful is this place!", he exclaimed, for "Yahweh is here and I knew it not". So for him it became "none other than the house of God (Bethel) and the gate of heaven" (Gen. xxviii. 10-22). It is this type of numinous experience that lies at the root of the religious response to sacredness.

## Providence and the Food Supply

In primitive society the deepest emotions and most heartfelt wants, hopes and fears are aroused, however, chiefly within the corporate life of the community, rather than in isolated experiences like that attributed to Jacob. Under the precarious conditions in which the human species lived when it first emerged from its mammalian ancestry, and in which it has remained in primitive society throughout the ages, corporate life has been essential. In enabling the members of the several groups to live together in an orderly arrangement of social relations, and to adjust themselves to their physical, spiritual and economic environment, religion has exercised a powerful unifying influence. In addition to consolidation the essential need of the human race at all times has been and must remain the promotion and conservation of life. As Frazer has said, "to live and to cause to live, to eat food and to beget children, these were the primary wants of man in the past, and they will be the primary wants of man in the future so long as the world lasts. Other things may be added to enrich and beautify human life, but unless these wants are first satisfied, humanity itself must cease to exist" (*Golden Bough*, Pt. IV, Vol. 1, p. 5). Therefore, these two things, food and children, have become the tokens of the beneficence of the world which may be summed up in our term *Providence*. It is this notion of providential bounty that represents the concrete universal good. Upon it man is dependent for his sustenance, well-being and the continuance of the race, and the institutions of religion have been the means whereby communion with and in beneficent abundance and fecundity have been secured.

The mysterious forces of nutrition and propagation being sacred and the centres of emotional interest and concern, a reverent attitude has been adopted towards them, together with a ritual technique for the purpose of bringing them under some measure of supernatural control. To eat is to live. Therefore, the main link between man and his environment is food. By receiving it he feels the forces of destiny and providence. For the primitive, as Malinowski

has said, "nature is his living larder". Before the discovery of methods of cultivating the soil and domesticating animals, when he eked out a precarious existence, relying mainly on the chase and on edible fruits, roots and berries for his means of subsistence, the animal and vegetable species which formed his stable diet were for him the personification of Providence. With this mysterious power he endeavoured to establish an efficacious sacramental relationship.

### **Palaeolithic Hunting Ritual**

That this ritual attitude to food and children, to nutrition and propagation, interpreted in terms of divine Providence, was established before the end of the last glaciation about 20,000 years ago, is shown by the archaeological evidence which has become available in recent years. Thus, the sculptures, engravings and frescoes of animal designs which have been discovered in the Palaeolithic caves in south-western France and on both the French and Spanish sides of the Pyrenees, can be explained only as part of a ritual technique of hunting bands. The paintings frequently occur in inaccessible recesses of tortuous caverns, reached today with modern equipment often only with very considerable difficulty and even peril.

For example, on the limestone hills above Puente Viesgo, a small watering-place with hot springs in Cantabria near Santander in northern Spain, lie two decorated caves, the one known as Castillo, the other as Pasiega. The easier one of the two to explore is Castillo, but, even so, to reach the galaxy of paintings and engravings of Palaeolithic horses, bison, elephants, chamois, ibex and a curious frieze of human hand designs, the aid of an experienced guide is required. Pasiega, half a mile farther on across the valley, is a veritable labyrinth of very small passages which can be entered only by descending a well some six feet deep. Following a low winding corridor leading to a vast network of passages and taking one of these to the left, a small chamber containing numerous animal designs and a throne-like structure in stone is reached after much scrambling. The whole of this district is studded with similarly

decorated caves, few of which are very accessible, though none of them is quite so difficult to explore as Pasiega, or that called Pileta at the other end of the Peninsula in the province of Malaga, near Ronda. There ropes and a ladder are needed to see the fine collection of styles of Palaeolithic art enshrined in this great "gallery" on the top of the sierra.

Some of the more spectacular sites like Altamira, Font-de-Gaume and Lascaux, now that they have become tourist centres, are lighted by electricity and made very easy to visit. This enables the paintings to be seen to much better advantage, though it gives them the appearance of having been subterranean art galleries rather than what they really were. In the dim religious light of a flickering lamp, such as the original artists had to employ, they could hardly fail to be recognized as prehistoric sanctuaries, entered no doubt with due solemnity by those duly qualified to engage in the sacred rites.

To make a first-hand study of this important aspect of the cult of Early Man, the best centre is Les Eyzies in the French province of the Dordogne on the banks of the Vézère. With a car, or even a pedal cycle, the principal decorated caves in the district—Font-de-Gaume, Combaralles, La Mouthe, Cap Blanc and Lascaux—can easily be visited. Second to the valley of the Vézère for this purpose is the department of Ariège in the Pyrenees, south of Toulouse, or the region around Santander in northern Spain.

Thus, from Les Eyzies the great cavern called Font-de-Gaume lies within half a mile of the village on the precipitous side of a small valley. It is now well-lighted with an electric installation giving an excellent view of the remarkable polychrome paintings on the walls of the tunnel from the entrance beyond a stalactite barrier which seems to have marked the beginning of the sacred enclosure. From this point onwards paintings abound on both walls until, at the end of the cave, a very narrow fissure marks off what may be described as "the holy of holies". A gate now bars the way to mere sightseers to prevent damage to the priceless pictures, but those privileged to enter for serious

investigation of the contents see above their heads in the rubicon a remarkable rendering in red ochre of a rhinoceros (Fig. 1), together with engravings of a lion and horses. It is inconceivable that a prehistoric artist with a flickering stone lamp burning marrow or fat with a wick of moss would have executed for aesthetic reasons designs on an almost vertical wall ten feet above the surface, sitting apparently on the shoulders of his assistant. The same applies to the engravings in a small chamber at the end of a long subterranean tunnel at the cave called Combarelles,

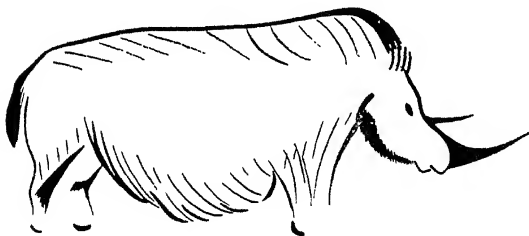


FIG. 1.—Rhinoceros from Font-de-Gaume.

a mile or so beyond Font-de-Gaume along the valley of the Beune on the Sarlat road. There, until it was recently excavated to attract tourists, access involved scrambling on hands and knees through a very narrow passage leading to the decorated chamber.

In the vast cavern of Niaux near Tarascon-sur-Ariège in the Pyrenees, the great hall—with its portraits of wounded bison and representations of the horse, ibex and reindeer, the head of a stag, and the forms of two fish traced on the sand, with the footprints of one of the artists covered by stalagmite under a ledge near by—is situated a mile from the entrance and separated from it by a lake, originally some six feet deep. Continuing the passage horizontally into the mountain, the road at length divides, and on the path to the right three small cup-like hollows under an overhanging wall have been cleverly utilized to represent

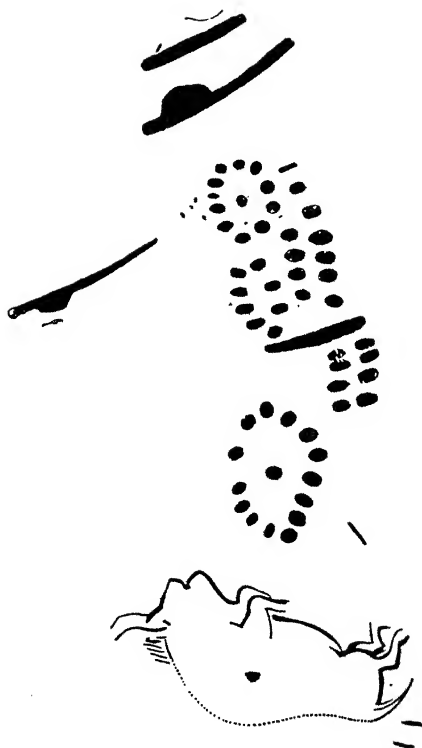


FIG. 2.—Expiring Bison from Niaux.

wounds by drawing round them the outline of a bison and marking the cups with arrows in red ochre. In front of the expiring bison are circles and club-shaped designs depicting missiles (Fig. 2).

Scenes of this kind reveal that the paintings were made to control the fortunes of the chase by casting a spell on the actual animals being hunted outside. Most of the figures are those of species suitable for food, and the frequent occurrence of palimpsests suggests that certain spots in the caves were thought to be peculiarly efficacious for casting spells. For example, in a long narrow passage called Marsoulas, near Salies-du-Salat in Haute Garonne, a series of polychromes with spear markings have been painted one above the other. Nevertheless, killing by magical devices, such as painting arrows on vulnerable places like the heart on a painting of an animal required for food, was not the only purpose of the cultus practised in these prehistoric sanctuaries.

Thus, just outside the small market town of St. Girons in the foot-hills of the Pyrenees lie two very instructive sites, though they are by no means easy to explore. The first, known as Tuc d'Audoubert, was discovered in 1912 by the three sons of the Count Bégouen on their father's estate. These adventurous youths took a boat and rowed up the subterranean river Volp, which flowed out of the cave, and then scrambled up into a large chamber of stalactites. In the corner is a narrow passage containing engravings of the horse, bison and reindeer, and traces of paintings. Breaking through a stalactite barrier and worming their way along a bottle-neck not much larger than a drain-pipe, they were rewarded by being the first persons, in all probability, to gain access to the chamber (by what was actually a back door) after the entrance had been blocked by a landslide at the end of the Palaeolithic. Here they found marks of the naked feet of the original artists who had penetrated to this carefully concealed sanctuary in which were skilfully modelled clay figures of a male bison following a female (Fig. 3), leaning up against a boulder. Representations of the scene are displayed in a realistic tableau at the Natural History Museum in Toulouse.





Fig. 3.—Clay Bison from Tuc d'Audoubert.

Near by, in front of a small clay hillock, are interlacing heel-marks which are thought to have been made during a sacred dance, doubtless for the purpose of making the species increase and multiply, as the scene clearly portrays propagation. It would seem, then, that, just as at Niaux the cultus was directed to the magical destruction of the animals required for food, so at Tuc d'Audoubert it was a fertility ritual that was enacted to maintain the supply, very much as the native tribes in Australia hold elaborate ceremonies at rocks adorned with drawings of sacred animals (totems) to promote their multiplication. This they do by a co-operative effort on the part of each group which stands in a very close relationship with its supernatural ally, or totem, for the benefit of the rest of the community, even though they themselves may not eat of the sacred species.

While it cannot be assumed that Palaeolithic society was organized on a totemic basis, as so many different varieties of animals are depicted in the same cave, nevertheless, it was clearly the duty of certain persons to carry out the rites in these decorated sanctuaries in the prescribed manner. Thus, the dauntless sons of the Count Bégouen, not content with their remarkable discovery at the Tuc, two years later crawled through a small vertical shaft not much bigger than a rabbit-hole, at the end of a little cave called Enlène, near the entrance to Tuc d'Audoubert at the top of the limestone mountain. Here in a second cave, appropriately named after them as La Grotte des Trois Frères, they found at the end of a steep passage the partly painted, partly engraved figure of a man with a human face and long beard, the eyes of an owl, the antlers of a stag, the ears of a wolf, the claws of a lion and the tail of a horse (Fig. 4). On the rock wall just beside this striking representation of a "sorcerer", or shaman, engaged apparently in a sacred dance, is an aperture serving the purpose of a window at which perhaps the shaman himself stood to perform his rites in the presence of the sacred object and those taking part in the act of worship, if so it may be described. Whether or not the strange figure was the symbol of an arch-sorcerer embodying the attributes and

functions of all the creatures it portrayed, a cult is indicated in which men and animals were brought together in a mystic fellowship in a joint endeavour to conserve and promote the food supply. Moreover, similar dancing



FIG. 4.—“The Sorcerer” from Les Trois Frères.

figures wearing animal masks have been discovered at Abri Mège in the Dordogne, at Marsoulas, at the Grotte de la Madeleine and at Lourdes, near a more famous grotto which still attracts nearly a million pilgrims every year to a world-renowned Pyrenaean centre of worship and spiritual healing.

Some of these decorated caves would seem to have been set apart solely as shrines for the performance of rites to control the chase, increase the food supply or to establish a vital relationship with the providential bounty upon which mankind depended for subsistence. Thus, at Niaux in Ariège and at Montespan in Haute Garonne, where clay figures of wounded animals also have been found in a most inaccessible cavern, no traces of a hearth or of human habitations occur. Even where the entrance has been occupied as a shelter, the paintings and engravings are in remote galleries, or at different levels from the inhabited parts, as at Tuc d'Audoubert and Trois Frères, often separated from the outer world by formidable obstacles. A great sanctuary like Lascaux—with its amazing galaxy of styles in mauve and purple, as well as the more familiar black and red pigments, called by the Abbé Breuil the Versailles of Palaeolithic art—must have been a cult centre for several thousand years, since almost every phase of the art of Périgord is represented in it.

A great variety of rites must have been performed within its sacred walls, ranging from hunting magic to some mysterious commemorative symbolism depicting the hazards of the chase. Thus, in the most secluded recesses approached by a descent of some twenty feet, so dangerous that even today the services of an experienced guide are required to explore it, a scene portrays a man killed by a bison with its flank transfixed by a spear exposing its entrails. Nearby, a woolly rhinoceros, painted in a different style, seems to be moving slowly away after perhaps having ripped up the bison, if it is to be associated with the rest of the group. A little lower down is a bird on a pole (Fig. 5). The Abbé Breuil interprets the scene as a votive painting to the deceased hunter, whom he thinks may have been buried in the cave. Another possible explanation would be that it had a more sinister motive, having been executed with malicious intent to bring about the destruction of the hunter. In any case, in view of its position, it must have been regarded as having great potency for good or ill by those who painted it in this very dangerous and difficult part of the cave. More accessible is a mythical animal of



FIG. 5.—Hunting scene from Lascaux.

unicorn type, unless it is a masked sorcerer in a spotted skin impersonating perhaps some ancestral spirit believed to be responsible for fertility and success in the chase.

### Fertility Ritual and the Mystery of Birth

In addition to this highly developed cultus in these prehistoric sanctuaries, a number of small figures, carved in stone and ivory, of women with the maternal organs grossly emphasized occurred in the Upper Palaeolithic in Europe contemporary with the beginnings of cave art. These statuettes are examples of a life-symbolism which later was associated with a highly developed fertility cultus of the Mother-goddess in Crete, the Aegean and Western Asia. Indeed, they are usually termed "Venus figures", and the voluptuous lines in several instances clearly indicate pregnancy. The large and pendulous breasts are very carefully modelled in the figurine found at Willendorf in Austria (Fig. 6D), but the face is omitted altogether, suggesting that the interest was centred upon the maternal symbolism. Therefore, the urge of life from within and the struggle for existence from without, directed the religious impulse at a very early period to the adoption of ritual devices to make man and beast fruitful and multiply.

To the primitive mind the figure of a woman with her characteristic features given special prominence readily becomes a symbol of her functions just as the phallus symbolizes generative power. The image, the person or things represented, and the attributes associated with the object, are conceived as one complete whole. The woman being the mother of the race, she is essentially the life-producer, as her male partner is the begetter. Therefore, their respective maternal and generative organs are thought to be endowed with vitalizing power like blood, the vital essence in an organism. Thus, in a French rock-shelter at Laussel on the river Beune in the Dordogne, among the remains of the last occupation of the site, three bas-reliefs in stone of female figures were found in 1911. On one of these an obese woman, doubtless in an advanced stage of pregnancy, was very skilfully depicted holding the horn of a bison in her right hand (Fig. 6A), with traces of red colouring

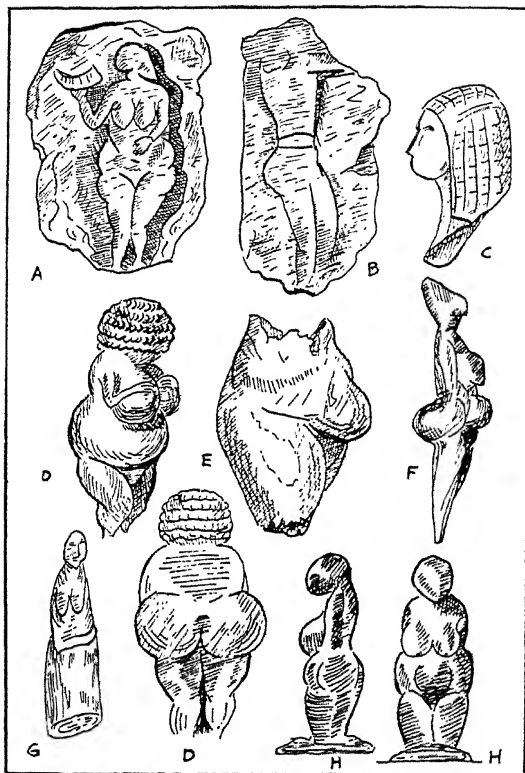


FIG. 6.—(a) The Willendorf "Venus". (b) "Woman with a Horn", from Laussel.

matter on the polished figures. This pigment, it would seem, was applied to increase the vitalizing qualities of the realistic bas-relief, since in primitive symbolism red ochre is the best substitute for blood as a life-giving agent. Moreover, it has the advantage of being more durable and therefore of supplying an enduring potency.

### **The Mystery of Death and the Cult of the Dead**

As a hunter, Palaeolithic Man could hardly fail to have observed that when an animal or a human being was wounded, loss of blood caused faintness, unconsciousness and ultimately death. Blood, therefore, would appear to be the vital fluid, and if this could be restored the corpse might thereby be revived. Thus, among peoples in a primitive state of culture today, mourners not infrequently gash themselves and allow their blood to fall upon the deceased during the course of the funeral rites. If substances like red pigments were regarded as the equivalent of blood, they would be calculated to have the same effect. This doubtless explains the widespread custom in the Old Stone Age of burying the dead ceremonially with red ochre and in red-stained earth.

For example, at Grimaldi on the Italian Riviera in the Grotte du Cavillon, the fourth of the series of Upper Palaeolithic caves between Mentone and Ventimiglia, the bones of a Crô-Magnon type of skeleton were stained with red ochreous powder like those found by Dean Buckland in 1823 in the Paviland cave in the limestone cliffs of Glamorgan on the Gower coast, overlooking the Bristol Channel. In the first of the Grimaldi group—that called La Grotte des Enfants—red powder surrounded the head of one interment, and in another of this remarkable series of burials—e.g. Barma Grande—the skulls lay in a bed of red earth covered with a coating of red ochre. So common, in fact, was this practice—recurring in the Dordogne at the Crô-Magnon type station at Les Eyzies, at Chancelade near Périgueux, at Brno in Czechoslovakia, and at Hoteaux and at Obercassel near Bonn—that it can be regarded only as an established feature in the Palaeolithic cult of the dead. As Professor Macalister says, “the purpose of the rite is



perfectly clear. Red is the colour of living health. The dead man was to live again in his own body, of which the bones were the framework. To paint it with the colour of life was the nearest thing to mummification that the Palaeolithic people knew; it was an attempt to make the body again serviceable for its owner's use" (*Text-Book of European Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1921), p. 502).

Moreover, in addition to ochre, the bodies at the Grotte des Enfants were also surrounded with a multitude of shells. Two of the children, in fact, were placed in a shroud composed of nearly a thousand sea-shells, and in La Grotte du Cavillon the skeleton of a man, lying in the contracted position, had over two hundred pierced shells about its head. In the Crô-Magnon burial at Les Eyzies three hundred pierced marine shells, chiefly of the *Littorina* species, were discovered beside the skeletons, despite the fact that the rock shelter was many miles inland. These, it would appear, had been strung together to form necklaces, as in the case of the later examples found in the Mesolithic cave of Mas d'Azil in Ariège. In a ceremonial interment at Laugerie-Basse adjoining Les Eyzies, cowries, shaped in the form of the portal through which a child enters the world, were arranged in pairs upon the body; two pairs on the forehead, one near each arm, four in the region of the thighs and knees, and two upon each foot. The care with which they were placed is suggestive of a ceremonial interment to give life to the deceased.

That many of the skeletons in Palaeolithic graves have been buried in a crouched or flexed posture, sometimes has been explained as indicating the position of the embryo before birth, and therefore inspired by the idea of rebirth. But it is very doubtful whether in those days people knew much, if anything, about the ante-natal attitude and its symbolism. It is much more likely that contracted burial with the legs drawn up was suggested by the normal attitude of sleep, while the flexing of the body before *rigor mortis* had set in was in all probability for the purpose of preventing the ghost from "walking" to molest the survivors. But the care bestowed upon the burial at La Ferrassie in the Dordogne with stones over the head to

protect it and others surrounding the skeleton, together with a vast quantity of flint implements and the bones of a variety of Pleistocene animals—e.g. woolly rhinoceros, reindeer, bison, ibex—shows a respect for the dead that went beyond fear and indicates some conception of a life after death.

Before the arrival of *Homo sapiens* in the type known as Crô-Magnon, the more primitive species differentiated as *Homo neanderthalensis*, first detected in a cave in the Neander valley near Düsseldorf in 1856, with its thick and heavy bones, low broad skull, receding forehead, prominent brow-ridges and projecting jaw, unquestionably practised ceremonial interment. Thus, at Le Moustier, in the Dordogne, the type station of its flint industry, the skeleton of a youth was laid to rest on its right side in the attitude of sleep, with the forearm under the head and the skull resting on a pillow of flints. Near the right hand was a magnificent oval hand-axe and a scraper not far away, while above the skull were deposited the burnt bones of an ancient ox, the *urus*. At La Chapelle-aux-Saints in Corrèze a human skeleton had been carefully buried in a trench with a number of implements, and at Spy in Belgium two skeletons were found interred in a similar manner in a pit in front of a cave. It is hardly likely that Neanderthal Man would have gone to all this trouble in burying his dead with so much care, and providing them with what he thought they would need in the next world, unless he had believed in a life after death of some kind, undefined though it may have been.

### The Cult of Skulls

More remarkable was the discovery in 1939 of a Neanderthal skull showing signs of a severe wound in a grotto at Monte Circeo in Italy on the Tyrrhenian coast of the Pomptine Marshes, within a circle of stones. The supposition is that it had been taken to the cave as a trophy after the man had been murdered or killed by a serious accident, perhaps 70,000 years ago. It would appear that the brain had been extracted and eaten sacramentally to imbibe its life-giving qualities, since the widespread primitive practice

of head-hunting invariably has been connected with the belief that soul-substance of great potency is concentrated in the head. By collecting skulls the hunter increases his own fertility and that of his tribe. It may have been with some such intention that the Neanderthaloids took this particular trophy to the sacred cave at Monte Circeo and erected it in a ritual position, thereby anticipating their successors in France and Spain, who, as we have seen, resorted to their cavern sanctuaries for these purposes, namely, to promote and conserve life.

If this is the earliest evidence of this type of ceremonial at present available, it is by no means the only indication of a cult of skulls in prehistoric times. It has indeed been suggested that in China, some three hundred thousand years before the Neanderthals lived in Italy, human heads had been decapitated at Chou-Kou-Tien and then carefully preserved. Or, again, in Java the Ngandoeng skulls appear to have been hacked open, possibly at a cannibal feast, and used perhaps subsequently as skull-bowls, very much as some savages drink from the skull of a warrior to acquire his strength. The strongest evidence, however, that Early Man engaged in head-hunting comes from two caves near Nördlingen in Bavaria where, in Mesolithic deposits, intermediate between the Upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic periods, in a spur of the Jura known as Ofnet, nests of twenty-seven human skulls occurred in one of the two caves and six in the other (each with one or more of the neck vertebrae still attached). The heads had been deliberately cut off from the trunk with flint knives after death and ceremonially preserved. Then they had been dried and buried in the ossuary, often crushing or distorting those previously placed in it. They were orientated in a westerly direction and immersed in a layer of red ochre. Twenty were those of children ornamented with snail shells, nine were of women with necklaces of deer teeth, and four only were of men, possibly because women and children were easier victims for ritual purposes. In the grotto of Trou-Violet at Montardit a fragment of a skull having had the flesh and skin peeled off, together with a few small bones and a number of pebbles arranged in the form of a human body, may have

been in the nature of a cenotaph commemorating a notable person in which the head was the object of veneration.

### Conclusion

From this very brief survey of the archaeological and anthropological evidence bearing upon religious phenomena in the Old Stone Age, it may reasonably be concluded that Early Man was deeply impressed by the mystery of death and birth, and by his dependence on a providential source of life and well-being, and of the forces governing nature. Having little understanding of natural processes and laws beyond his own observations, he felt the need of establishing friendly and beneficial relations with the living Reality overruling the mysterious phenomena around him. This constituted his conception of a divine Providence greater than himself and controlling his destinies. Thus was aroused in him a "numinous" reaction to the inexplicable, unpredictable, awe-inspiring element in his experience which found expression in a ritual technique for the purpose of establishing efficacious relations with the Source of all bounty and beneficence, above and within the world, at once transcendent and immanent as we might say in our idiom.

It was not, however, only to enable these ill-provided denizens to secure the means of subsistence and to advance with hope and confidence on life's journey that supernatural aid was sought. Even lowly Neanderthal Man, degenerate though he may have been and doomed to extinction as a type, had already begun to look forward to a life beyond the grave—a life like that which he had lived on earth, no doubt, for he could conceive none other, where he would still need the food and the tools he had always required. Moreover, if he was to live again in his body it must be restored to life with the aid of such vitalizing agents as ochre and shells. So eventually these, too, were buried with the corpse.

It was in such ways as these, it would seem, that religion began, and, although archaeology can supply only the raw material, from these early beginnings has emerged the

complex pattern of myth and ritual, of faith and practice, which constitutes the history of religion when Early Man passed from a food-gathering to a food-producing state of culture.

#### BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

In addition to the works mentioned in this chapter the following books may be read for further study of this aspect of the subject:

Burkitt, M. C., *Prehistory*, Cambridge, 1925; *The Old Stone Age*, Cambridge, 3rd Edition, 1955.

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## CHAPTER II

### RELIGION IN THE ANCIENT MIDDLE EAST

THE transition from hunting, fishing and collecting food to the cultivation of edible plants and/or the breeding of cattle, sheep and goats had a profound effect upon the development of religion. The ritual control of fertility and food production now came to be concentrated upon the crops, the sequence of the seasons and the rearing of flocks and herds rather than upon the precarious conditions of the chase. Under the influence of these new economies, social structures and religious organizations began to emerge adapted to the requirements of an agricultural or a pastoral mode of life, and often to those of "mixed farming" in which cultivation was combined with stock-rearing and hunting.

#### Neolithic Civilization in the Fertile Crescent

The rise of Neolithic civilization was a very gradual process slowly adopted and localized in certain regions, especially in the "Fertile Crescent" in the Middle East, extending from the Nile valley, Palestine and Syria to Mesopotamia and Iraq, where as early as the fifth millennium B.C. husbandry and domestication began to supplement food-gathering in a number of communities situated in Tells like Sialk on the western edge of the arid Iranian plateau, Qalat Jarmo on the Kurdish foot-hills to the east of the Tigris, Tell Hassuna in Assyria, Merimde north of Cairo to the west of the Nile Delta, and at Badari and Deir Tasa in Middle Egypt. At these, and other similar sites in this region, recent excavations have brought to light evidence of very early settlements (i.e. c. 5000-4000 B.C.) in favourable oases in which the inhabitants continued to hunt and fish while they tilled the land, grew corn and kept a few sheep or cattle. From their cemeteries it is clear that they attached considerable importance to the cult of the

dead since the bodies were flexed or contracted, often facing the west, and surrounded with personal possessions. At Badari, where the corpses were very well preserved owing to the dry conditions of the soil, the grave furniture included ivory and clay female figurines, quartz beads, ivory combs and bracelets, and necklaces of Red Sea shells and anklets.

### The Cult of the Dead in Ancient Egypt

Since the first Predynastic, or Amratian, culture of Upper Egypt may have been descended from the Badarian Neolithic substratum, with infusions from the margins of the desert, in view of the tremendous importance attached to mortuary ritual in the religion of Ancient Egypt, it is significant that at this very early period the cult of the dead was coming into considerable prominence. True, climatic and geographical conditions in the Nile valley have played their part in the preservation of the dead buried in the sand of the desert and of the "proud pyramids of stone proclaiming man's sense of sovereign power in his triumph over material forces". Indeed, it may have been the fact that corpses were naturally desiccated by the hot, dry sand, and so preserved indefinitely, that in Egypt attention came to be concentrated in such a marked degree upon human survival, and eventually the art of mummification was perfected there when burial in stone-lined tombs made it necessary to invent ways of artificially preserving the body, since it was then no longer placed in direct contact with the desiccating sand.

Be this as it may, probably as early as the First Dynasty (c. 3200 B.C.) attempts began to be made to embalm the dead with natron (salt) and various resins for the purpose of artificially preserving the body from decay. To these soon were added evisceration and the development of an elaborate technique to render the tissues imperishable and to restore the likeness of the deceased, while the priests had to reconstitute the mental faculties and revivify the mummy ceremonially with the aid of water, incense and similar ritual life-giving agents and potent amulets. By this "Opening of the Mouth" rite the individual became a

re-created "living soul", or *ba*, and was given strength and ability to confront successfully his spiritual adversaries beyond the grave. The entrails were embalmed separately



FIG. 7.—"Opening of the Mouth" Ceremony in Ancient Egypt.

and kept in four "canopic" jars in imitation of what had been done to restore Osiris to life, the most popular god of ancient Egypt who was both the lord of the dead and the god of vegetation.



The elaborate method of attaining immortality by a series of mechanical and magical operations was too expensive to be within the means of any but the ruling classes. Commoners, in fact, do not appear to have been much concerned with this aspect of the cult of the dead. It was only the Pharaoh, or some very important person, who at first underwent this elaborate process of mummification which took seventy days to complete. Gradually it was extended to local chiefs and by the Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1580 B.C.) it became a universal practice. But even so portrait statues of the deceased frequently were placed in tombs as part of the funerary equipment to serve the purposes of the body when its very imperfectly preserved mummy decayed. To make the statue (or the mummy) into a living soul (*ba*) it was reanimated by libations of Nile water, censings, and touching of the eyes, nose and ears with a copper chisel, Fig. 7. The sculptor, in fact, was called "he who makes to live" (*s'nh*), since it was his function to provide a permanent imperishable abode for the dead by fashioning the portrait statue, or the death-mask, as a surrogate of the body.

The "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony was based on that performed during the royal mummification and the daily toilet rite enacted by the pharaoh at dawn in the so-called House of the Morning before he entered the temple to officiate as high-priest. It was, therefore, essentially a royal ritual in origin based upon the lustrations supposed to have been performed by the Sun-god, Re, before he arose each morning in the east, defeating darkness and chaos. Each sunrise, and each New Year's Day, repeated the first sunrise on the day of creation, and it was the pharaoh in his divine capacity as the son of his heavenly father, Re, who made the sun rise every day to "illuminate the Two Lands" (i.e. Upper and Lower Egypt) and make them "green more than a great Nile" (i.e. a flood).

### The Divine Kingship

The divine kingship, in short, was the dynamic unifying centre in ancient Egypt. The Sun-god was represented as having been the first ruler in primordial times and the

pharaoh was his physical son, image and incarnation—"he who gives life" and mediates between God and man. As Re bathed in the heavenly ocean when he arose every morning, so the king engaged in similar ablutions daily at dawn to renew his divine nature and vitality as "that beneficent god the fear of whom is throughout the countries", as the texts repeatedly affirm. Egypt, often described as the only daughter of Re, was entrusted to him by his celestial father to nurture and control her as a theocratic state. To maintain the divine descent and inheritance pharaohs married their sisters, and to beget an heir to the throne they visited their queen in the guise of Re resplendent in majesty, so that both before and after death they were regarded as a god by virtue of their procreation and of their succession from the mythological god-kings of long ago.

The last of these primordial god-kings was called "the Horus", a sky deity of the falcon clan in predynastic times who was alleged to have conquered the Delta and set up a single line of kings with a centralized administration. At the beginning of the historical (Dynastic) period he was well established at Hierakonpolis, the predynastic centre of his worship and clan. It was there that he was identified with the king of Upper Egypt. Subsequently he was known as Horus and was believed to have inherited his divine nature as well as his throne, passing it on to his successor at his death. Added to this was the fiction of the filial relationship of the pharaoh with the sun-god, Re, fostered by the priests of Heliopolis, the centre of solar worship in the Fifth Dynasty (*c.* 2580 B.C.), together with the identification of the falcon-Horus with Horus the son of Osiris, the god of vegetation and lord of the dead.

Exactly how this equation was established is still in debate among Egyptologists. Whatever explanation may be given, the pharaohs reigned as the Osirian Horus who, according to the legend, after having been conceived by Isis when she hovered over the mummy of her murdered husband (Osiris), Fig. 8, revenged the death of his father by engaging in mortal combat with his uncle Seth, the perpetrator of the criminal conspiracy against Osiris. In



FIG. 8.—Isis Hovering over the Mummy of Osiris.

this mythological struggle between Horus and Seth may be detected perhaps the conflicts of the Predynastic Horus kings before the nation was unified in a single ruler with divine prerogatives. Thus, Orisis may have been a prehistoric nomadic chief or leader who introduced agriculture among the indigenous people in the eastern Delta and eventually came to blows with their ruler Seth when the intruders penetrated up the Nile as far south as Abydos. If Osiris was killed, his son Horus may have rectified the position, and the episode eventually was immortalized in tradition in terms of a death and resurrection myth and ritual in which the culture-hero (Osiris) played the leading role.

Be this as it may, in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, when texts were inscribed on the pyramids containing a mass of information about the religious thought and practice of the period, and of the preceding centuries, we are left in no doubt that as every dead king was Osiris, so every living king was Horus who had been established on the throne by the decree of the gods when his father (Osiris) was vindicated by the heavenly tribunal, or Ennead, of nine gods. Therefore, in spite of all the complications in the royal office introduced by the number of different traditions and mythologies handed down from prehistoric times, its divine origin and status was never in question. By his formal titles and every line of approach the pharaoh was the living epitome of all that was divine in the Nile valley, and in his complex personality he incorporated the attributes of all the gods he embodied. In theory he was the priest in every temple to every god, though in practice he was compelled to delegate his sacerdotal functions to the local priesthoods as his deputies or vicars who officiated on his behalf and impersonated the gods they represented in the various ceremonies.

To what extent the king was himself the recipient of worship during his lifetime is by no means clear, but at death he was the subject of an elaborate mortuary cult like that of all Osirian dead. At first, as we have seen, only kings and nobles were rendered imperishable by the prescribed ritual technique, and the Pyramid Texts are mainly

devoted to procuring eternal life for the pharaoh in the celestial realms. In them vivid descriptions are given of the way in which he was imagined to reach heaven, ascending on a ladder, as in Jacob's dream at Bethel, or on the tail of a heavenly cow. Sometimes he was represented as flying up as a bird, or being wafted to the sky in the smoke of incense, or, again, in a sandstorm. However the ascent was made it was to enable him to join his *ka*, i.e. that spiritual part of man which was regarded as the entire "self" of the person in the form of an entity at once independent of and separable from the body, protective of it as a guardian spirit, and constituting what we should describe as its "personality", "soul", or "individuality".

But the *ka* was also a divinity personified as a god involving the idea of divine creative power, assigned at first only to kings. Later, in the Middle and New Kingdoms, it was supposed a *ka* was born with every man, and at death it lived in the tomb with the body, unless, with the development of the Osiris cult, the soul (*ba*) went to be with the *ka* for ever in heaven in a spiritualized body after it had been justified at the weighing of the heart before Thoth in the hereafter, Fig. 9. Thus, the boon of immortality as a royal privilege became a universal hope, though the king being a god on earth always lived with his *ka*, whereas ordinary mortals joined their *kas* only at death when they became identified with Osiris. It would seem, therefore, that the divinity which originally was vested in the kingship was extended to all mankind in some measure inasmuch as everybody who was justified at the judgment and admitted to the Fields of the Blessed virtually became divine (i.e. Osiris).

Nevertheless, the throne was the pivot of society because its occupant was endowed with the plenitude of spiritual power, and such were its prerogatives that a sickly youth in his teens in the face of the strenuous opposition of the highly organized Theban priesthood at the height of its power, inaugurated a new state religion. Thus, Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton) did not hesitate to break with the Amorite priesthood on his accession in 1375 B.C., transfer the seat of government to Amarna and to institute the monotheistic worship of Aton as the sole sovereign Lord of the

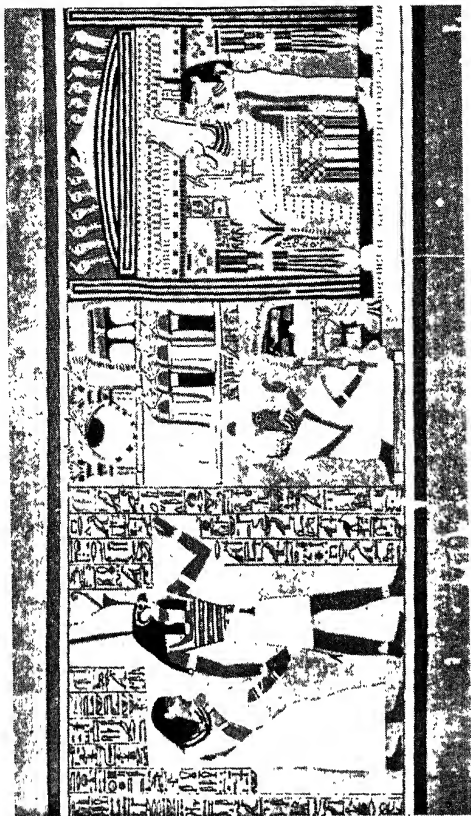


FIG. 9.—The Weighing of the Heart before Osiris.

universe dwelling in light invisible behind the disk of the sun, which was the symbol of his presence. This first attempt in the history of religion to establish a genuine monotheism failed because the reform of Ikhnaton proved to be incapable of fulfilling the proper function of religion and the monarchy in the social structure, either in respect of the consolidation and maintenance of the Empire before the rising tide of Hittite and Aramaean forces in Syria and Palestine, or of supplying the popular demands of a cultus. Therefore, at the death of the pharaoh in 1358 the Theban priestly polytheistic rule was restored without impairing the divine prerogatives of the throne.

In Mesopotamia, on the other hand, the localization of the kingship in the rulers of the city-states prevented absolute sovereignty being vested in a single divine embodiment of all the gods as the dynastic centre of the nation and the cosmic order. The unpredictable behaviour of the Tigris and Euphrates in contrast to the uniformity of the inundation of the Nile in Egypt, and the variability of the climatic conditions with the drought in summer and the torrential rainfall in winter, made for instability. Thus, the country was divided into a series of city-states loosely bound together to meet the practical needs of recurrent emergencies and governed either by a secular ruler, or by the high-priest of the city-god. The royal office in Mesopotamia, in fact, was a combination of personal administration based on the duty of the king to interpret the will of the gods by omens, augury and divination, and subservience to the hierarchy, the influential members of which might exercise the functions of the monarchy. Even after Hammurabi had unified the state in the empire in the second millennium B.C., and made Babylon the capital with its chief god Marduk the head of the pantheon, the king had to deliver up the symbols of his office to the high-priest every year at the Annual Festival and be reinstated by him acting on behalf of Marduk.

### **The Sacred Marriage**

Such an act of royal humiliation would have been unthinkable in Egypt, where, as we have seen, the pharaohs

reigned as gods incarnate and the centre of the whole structure of society. In Babylonia, on the other hand, kings were human beings who had been chosen by the gods to act as their servants on earth and to be the instruments of the Mother-goddess (Inanna, or Ishtar), who was regarded as the life-bestowing agent and who chose the ruler to be her bridegroom. In the Nile valley the queen was visited by her royal husband in all his divine majesty and glory to beget an heir to the throne. In Mesopotamia at the Annual Festival the king, in the guise of Tammuz, the husband-son of Ishtar, engaged in a sacred marriage with a priestess personifying the Mother-goddess to renew the life of nature in the spring. In this union she was the active partner rather than the king. Whether or not Professor Frankfort is right in thinking that only those kings were deified who had been commanded by the goddess to share her couch, the nuptial union of the king and the priestess in a Tammuz-Ishtar relationship at the end of the New Year ceremonies was performed to reawaken the creative forces of spring.

The uncertainty of the seasons in Babylonia were always a cause of grave anxiety. Therefore, it behoved the dwellers in Mesopotamia to leave nothing to chance, still less to the vagaries of nature. From time immemorial, far back in the prehistoric past, it would seem the marriage was celebrated of the youthful god who came to be known as Tammuz. Since the goddess was an incarnation of the fertility of nature and her husband incarnated the creative potency of spring, it is understandable that their union, impersonated by their earthly representatives and counterparts, should be considered to be efficacious in the revival of the dormant vegetative forces at a critical juncture in the seasonal sequence. Thus, in the third millennium B.C.

the annual marriage of the Shepherd-god Dumu-zi (i.e. Tammuz) to the Sumerian Mother-goddess Inanna was celebrated by the king in Isin in southern Mesopotamia in his capacity of the divine bridegroom (i.e. Dumu-zi) in a sacred marriage with a priestess impersonating Inanna to ensure prosperity in the forthcoming year. But whereas in Egypt the pharaoh exercised his life-giving office as the



living son of his divine father, in Mesopotamia the king was the passive instrument and obedient servant of the goddess who was the author and giver of life. Moreover, instead of reigning as the living and triumphant Horus, his prototype Dumu-zi or Tammuz was a suffering god dependent upon his mother-spouse, Inanna or Ishtar, for his rescue from the underworld into which he had descended.

### The Dying and Reviving God

It was this widespread myth of the vegetation year-god dying and coming to life again in the cycle of the crops which found characteristic expression in the Tammuz story and its enactment in the seasonal ritual in Mesopotamia. The youthful "true son", as his Sumerian name Dumu-zi signifies, died every year and passed into the land of darkness and death from which there was no return. The Mother-goddess went after him to secure his release from the dread abode, and while she was in the underworld all life ceased on earth, as in the parallel Greek story in which it is alleged no flower blossomed and no animal or child of man was born when Persephone had been carried away to the realms of Pluto. The same theme recurs in the myth and ritual of Adonis that was celebrated in Western Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean at midsummer when the death of the Syrian "Lord" (*Adon*) was thought to occur. But unlike the virile youthful Tammuz, Adonis personified the all-too-brief spring destined to pass away like a shadow, "dead ere his prime".

The suffering resurrected god of Mesopotamia was a mature figure, revived and restored in order to fulfil his life-giving nuptial relations with the goddess as the source of all life, personifying the regenerative power and preserving the harmony between nature and society on which the prosperity of the country depended. In some respects he was the counterpart of Osiris in Egypt and of Adonis, Attis and Persephone in Syria, Anatolia and Greece, with their respective consorts, since the death and resurrection theme is fundamental in all these versions of what might appear to be a common story based on the seasonal sequence.

The suffering god in Mesopotamia, however, was a complex figure with peculiarities of his own which differentiated him from the other comparable divinities in the Fertile Crescent, Western Asia and the Aegean, or, indeed, from Frazer's conception of the "dying god" as a generalized spirit of fertility dying to live again. His relation to Ishtar or Inanni was quite different from that of Osiris to Isis. He was never a dead god who lived and reigned in his posthumous son like Horus and his living counterpart the pharaoh. On the contrary he was restored from the land of the dead in the fullness of his virile manhood and so became responsible for the revival of the new life from the parched ground in the spring and autumn. Consequently his release by the goddess and his restoration as her "resurrected child" was celebrated with universal rejoicing. The bitter lamentation for Tammuz (cf. Ezek. viii. 14), with wailing and the singing of dirges over the effigy of the dead god, was turned into joy as defeat became victory and life prevailed over periodic death in nature. The triumph, however precarious, was more enduring than in the Levant and in Greece, where it was destined to endure but for an hour during the fleeting loveliness of a passing spring. But it was never extended to man beyond the grave as in Egypt, where Osiris was the lord of the dead and the bestower of immortality on all who were justified in the hereafter. In Babylonia the grave was the dreary "land of no-return" for ordinary mortals, alike for kings and commoners. Therefore, renewal of life in nature did not carry with it newness of life in a future existence.

### **The New Year's Festival**

This fundamental difference between the two approaches to death and resurrection is shown in the way in which the New Year's Festival was observed in the respective civilizations. As this annual observance is a recurrent feature in most of the higher religions from its beginnings in the Ancient Middle East to its culmination in Christianity, it is very important for a right understanding of the history of religions to know how it arose and attained its central position. In studying ritual it is always essential to examine

it in relation to its surroundings and the prevailing climate. In Egypt, for example, the food supply, which was the emotional centre of the seasonal ritual, depended on the rise and fall of the Nile. Therefore, on this regular sequence of events the calendar and its festivals were based. The year began in June or July with the rise of the river as the "Season of Inundation". Four months later came the "Season of Coming Forth" at the end of the inundation when the crops were sown and began to sprout. Finally, the "Season of Deficiency" marked the decline of the life-giving waters after the grain had been cut and harvested, and the parched earth lay bare until the waters reappeared.

Each of these occasions in a sense was a "New Year's Day", since it represented a critical stage in the rise and fall of the Nile upon which vegetation so largely depended. Officially, the New Year coincided with the "Season of Inundation", but at the end of the month of Khoiak, when the waters abated and the fertilized fields re-emerged, elaborate rites were held in honour of the death and resurrection of Osiris, who was the personification of the river. Then it was that his entombment was enacted. From a late inscription engraved on the walls of the temple at Denderah in Upper Egypt it would appear that an effigy of Osiris cast in a mould of gold in the form of a mummy with the white crown of Egypt in his hand was filled with a mixture of barley and sand, wrapped in rushes and laid in a shallow basin. For nine days it was watered, and on the tenth day it was exposed to the sun and taken in a boat on a mysterious voyage. It was then swathed as a mummy and placed in a grave in an underground sepulchre. In the bas-reliefs which accompany the inscription he is represented, still as a mummy, wearing his crown and holding the sceptre and flail in his hands, raising himself out of the chest in which he had been incarcerated by Seth, with Isis behind him stretching out her wings. Before him a god holds the *crux ansata*, the symbol of life (Fig. 10A).

Here we have a graphic depiction of the resuscitation of the dead god, while in the temple of Isis at Philae stalks of wheat are shown growing from his mummy and watered by a priest, with the *crux ansata* before the bier. Moreover,

during the spring festival "beds of Osiris" made of barley were watered to secure plentiful crops and placed in tombs to give life to the dead. In the latter part of the observance the Festival of Ploughing was held in a field known as "the place of rejuvenation". The official ceremonies culminated in the erection of what is called the *Djed*-column, resembling a telegraph pole with four or five cross-bars at the top, sometimes depicted in human form with hands holding the sceptre and flail, and a human head crowned with a pair of horns and two Osirian feathers, or adorned with the *crux ansata* and two arms supporting the solar disk (Fig. 10). At Abydos, the reputed home of the body of Osiris, in the hall of the mysteries the pharaoh Seti I and Isis are portrayed setting up the pillar between them. On a tomb at Thebes the king is represented in a bas-relief raising the *Djed*-column with ropes assisted by a priest, with the queen and her sixteen daughters holding rattles and sistrums. A sham fight is in progress and herds of cattle are being driven round the walls of Memphis.

Although originally the *Djed*-column could be the symbol of any god, it was associated with Osiris at a very early period, and its erection at the beginning of spring, on the first day of the year, was thought to secure his rebirth in the sky. If the rite was performed on behalf of the reigning king it must have been to enable him to exercise his good offices in maintaining the prosperity of the country during the forthcoming year. Nevertheless, as Osiris impelled the growth of the grain and the rise of the inundation on which vegetation depended, he personified the emergence of life from death. Therefore, Osiris too had to be

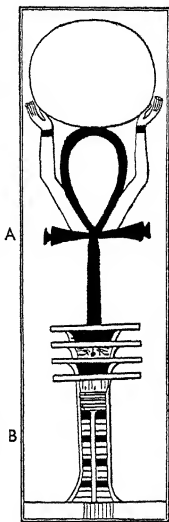


FIG. 10.—(A) The sign of Life (*Crux Ansata*). (B) The *Djed*-Column.

reborn at the turn of the year when the fertilizing waters of the Nile were due to begin their fructifying functions and the grain was about to sprout, as it were, from his body. This was symbolized by the raising of the *Djed*-column by the king in his Horus capacity, the relation of the pharaoh to Osiris being so close that the renewal of the one depended upon the resuscitation of the other.

It was, in fact, on the first day of spring that a very ancient royal renewal ceremony, called the *Sed*-festival, was held periodically, either thirty years after the accession of a pharaoh, or at shorter intervals. This took the form of a re-investiture to confirm the reigning sovereign in his kingdom by a ritual rejuvenescence. After he had sat alternately on each of two thrones to symbolize his rule over Upper and Lower Egypt, he crossed the temple court ceremonially thereby asserting his legitimate power over the entire land. He was then carried on a litter to the chapel of Horus of Libya to receive the sceptre, flail and crook of his office. Wrapped in a cloak, he was proclaimed four times and received the homage of his subjects and the blessing of the gods by their respective priests. Taking off the cloak he ran four courses, wearing the crown of Upper Egypt and carrying a short sceptre and whisk. He then offered his insignia to the jackal-god, Upuaut of Siut, and shot arrows of victory to the four cardinal points of the compass.

Although the symbolism is obscure, most Egyptologists have thought that it represented an impersonation by the pharaoh of the death and resurrection of Osiris. The purpose of the festival, however, was to renew the kingship of the living occupant of the throne and to maintain good relations between heaven and earth rather than to establish the succession as in the coronation rite. But in any case, since the pharaoh was strengthened in his divine office and enabled to exercise his functions on behalf of the nation with renewed vigour, the New Year was the appropriate time for such an event to be held, re-enacting the union of Upper and Lower Egypt first accomplished by the traditional Menes.

Under the unstable conditions that prevailed in Mesopo-

tamia the Annual Festival assumed a different form because, as has been explained, the divine control of natural forces was differently interpreted. There the goddess was supreme because she was the source of all life, and the ritual of her sacred marriage with her husband-son was the means by which the annual renewal in the processes of vegetation and fertility was secured. This constituted the climax of the spring rites, called in Akkadian the *Akitu*, held in Babylon in the month of Nisan, though in some of the older cities it had been observed in the autumn, in the month of Tishri, at the time of the ingathering of the harvest. When Hammurabi united Sumer and Akkad and made Babylon the capital and the worship of its god, Marduk, the state religion, his temple, known as *Esagila* ("the house that lifts up its head"), became the principal and most splendid sanctuary adorning the east bank of the Euphrates. Here the New Year celebrations were performed, occupying eleven days, during which the death and resurrection of Marduk were enacted, portraying the defeat of Tiamat, the primeval water-goddess of chaos, and her demons as recorded in the creation story, or *Enuma elish*, which was the cult-legend. This epic, the text of which is not complete,<sup>1</sup> was twice recited during the course of the festival, and its dramatic representation constituted the central feature of the ritual. Although precisely what was said and done are to some extent conjectural, it is clear that the contest between Marduk and Tiamat, involving the death and restoration of Marduk, was the principal theme enacted to promote the growth of the spring vegetation and culminating in the "fixing of the destinies" (i.e. determining the prosperity of the New Year) and the sacred marriage rite to secure the fertility of the land.

Throughout the elaborate ritual with its many complexities, some of the details of which are obscure, the king appears to have been the chief actor in the role of Marduk. This became most apparent on the fifth day when he was conducted to the shrine of the god, escorted by the priests, and there left alone in front of the statue.

<sup>1</sup> The text will be found in *Babylonian and Assyrian Religion*, by S. H. Hooke (1953), pp. 103 ff.

The high-priest then entered from an inner sanctuary and removed from the king his royal insignia, which he laid on a stool before Marduk. The priest struck him on his cheek, pulled his ears, forced him to his knees before the image, and made him make a negative confession declaring, "I have not sinned, O Lord of the lands, I have not been negligent regarding thy divinity, I have not destroyed Babylon". Thereupon the priest gave him a kind of absolution and blessing from the god, promised him success and prosperity, and restored his insignia to him as a sign of his reinstatement in his royal office after again striking him on the cheek. If this blow produced tears it was a propitious omen showing that Marduk regarded him with favour and that all would be well.

At this point the text fails us. But from other texts it would seem that having been reinstated on the eighth day, the king, holding his sceptre in his hand, conducted the statue of Marduk in a triumphal procession to the Festival House (*Bit-akitu*) outside the city to "fix the destinies" in a chapel dedicated to Nebo, the son of Marduk, who had rescued his father from the "mountain" (i.e. the underworld) in which he had been imprisoned. The victory over Tiamat was celebrated in the *Bit-akitu* at a great banquet before a return was made to the city for the consummation of the sacred marriage in the *Esagila*, enacted by the king and the priestess. The destinies of the coming year were then fixed as at the creation, when the "table of destiny" was bestowed upon Marduk as the champion of the gods.

Thus, the New Year Festival in Babylon was a ritual enactment of the death and resurrection of the god who was the embodiment of the conditions of fertility, even though Marduk was never conceived as a single cosmic power like Re in Egypt any more than the monarchy was the dynamic centre of the social structure. Neither the king, the government nor the gods had an assured and completely secure position in an immutable order with the same god as the unchanging transcendental unifying principle as in the Horus relationship of the pharaohs. Nevertheless, the recurrence of the Tammuz-Marduk drama in the ritual texts discovered between 1930 and 1933 at Ras Shamra

(Ugarit) on the north coast of Syria shows how fundamental in the Ancient Middle East was the theme of the sorrowing goddess searching for her suffering but virile husband.

### The Ras Shamra Tablets

These tablets, belonging to the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C., are neither consecutive nor complete, but they represent a whole literature in an early alphabetic Canaanite tongue, resembling an early form of Phoenician and Hebrew, written in the wedged-shaped characters of the ancient script of Sumer and Akkad in Mesopotamia. Since they are part of an archive of a local temple in the Amarna Age in the middle of the second millennium B.C., although their decipherment is still incomplete they contain in poetic form a series of legends, myths and rituals bearing a striking resemblance to the Tammuz cult. Thus, the exploits recur of a sky-god named Aleyan, son of Baal, and his enemy Mot, son of El, the Lord of the underworld. After a struggle with a dragon called Yam or Nahar, which resulted in the victory of Aleyan, the conqueror seems to have been installed in a royal palace. It was in the height of summer that the beneficent Aleyan was killed, and his descent into the underworld was symbolized by the withering plants and parched ground during the season of drought. A search for his body was made by his consort Anath, apparently the Ishtar of the story, and when she encountered the adversary, Mot, she seized him, split his body with a ritual sickle (*harpe*), winnowed him, scorched him in the fire, ground him in a mill, scattered his flesh over the fields, and gave him to the birds to eat. In short, she treated him as the reaped grain. In due course he was revived and persuaded by the Sun-goddess to surrender and acknowledge the kingship of Aleyan, whereupon fertility was restored on the earth.

In the present state of the texts and their renderings their complex mythology is very uncertain, but the central theme would appear to be that of a struggle between life and death in nature in which a number of gods and goddesses play their several parts in the vegetation drama.



This is hardly surprising since it was in northern Syria that the cult of Adonis flourished with its germinating seeds sown in pots called "gardens" symbolizing the spring vegetation, and its wailings for the young god and the wilted plants. If, as seems very likely, the texts were New Year liturgical rituals, the rites may have ended with a sacred marriage to ensure the continuance of fertility in nature, since there are one or two references in the texts which point to the occurrence of a nuptial ceremony. Of this we cannot be at all certain, but there is good reason to believe that the Ras Shamra ritual was a Canaanite version of the Adonis-Tammuz cult, having no doubt its own peculiar features and differences, as in the parallel celebrations elsewhere in the Fertile Crescent. Behind them all was the common relationship of these gods with the life of vegetation involving their suffering and death when the grain was cut and threshed, and their revival with the re-emergence of the crops after the spring or autumn rains, or the inundation of the river, in the annual cycle of nature. Since the king and queen were either their embodiments or their servants on earth, they had to play their respective roles at the New Year Festival to ensure the fertility of the land and the prosperity of the nation over which they reigned in this sacred capacity.

### **The Hebrews**

It is against this general background that the beginnings of the history of Hebrew religion have to be studied. The nation that came to be known as Israel was of composite stock, arising in the second millennium B.C. in northern Mesopotamia from a combination of a non-Semitic group called Hurrians (i.e. the "Horites" of the Old Testament), whose original home was in the Kurdish mountains, with a widely dispersed people designated as Habiru in a number of early contemporary sources. Migrating westwards, they wandered into Palestine and intermingled with the indigenous Semitic Canaanite population, as is indicated in the stories of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the book of Genesis.

These narratives, of course, are very largely legendary in

their details and purpose, reflecting much later ethnological situations and religious beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, they give some indication of what was happening in that part of the Near East during the first half and about the middle of the second millennium when the ancestors of Israel were moving about with their flocks and herds between northern Mesopotamia and Syria, and a mixed group of nomads, known as Hyksos, had overrun Syria and Palestine from the north, eventually dominating Egypt until they were driven out about 1570 B.C. Thus, the story of Abraham sums up very broadly the tribal history of a part of the Habiru. Isaac is said to have imported a wife from Harran in northern Mesopotamia (Gen. xxiv.), and some of the composite people who came to be known as "Hebrews" went into Egypt in the wake of the Hyksos avalanche from the north (Gen. xii. 10 ff., xxvi. 1 ff.). There eventually they are represented as settling in the land of Goshen, which may have been the Wadi Tumilat on the eastern Delta.

At this point, however, a problem arises which has yet to be solved, if indeed a solution is possible. There is every reason to believe that the Hebrews were intimately associated with the Hyksos and that some of them at any rate infiltrated into Egypt during the widespread movement of peoples that was taking place throughout this period in the Ancient Middle East. It is very difficult, nevertheless, to fix the dates of their entrance into and exodus from the Nile valley. Their arrival would seem to have coincided with the Hyksos occupation as it would have been only at such a time that they would have been favourably received, as the Joseph story presupposes, granting its historicity, and given hospitality in the country.

It might appear, therefore, that the change of their fortunes under "a pharaoh who knew not Joseph", as recorded in the opening chapter of the book of Exodus, occurred when the Hyksos invasion came to an end about 1570 B.C. But the mention of the store-cities Pithom and Ramses as having been built by the enslaved Hebrews (Ex. i. 11) has led some scholars to think that Rameses II, (c. 1300-1224 B.C.) was the oppressor rather than Ahmose I

who drove out the Hyksos. It is suggested, therefore, that the escape which is called the Exodus was effected after the accession of the successor of Rameses II, namely Merenptah (c.1223-1215), who, we know from a stele discovered in Thebes in 1896, had to quell revolts in Palestine. After the First World War Professor Garstang carried out extensive excavations at Jericho which led him to conclude that the city was destroyed in the second half of the Late Bronze Age, about 1400 B.C. This seemed to confirm the Biblical chronology of 1 Kings vi.-4 which dates the Exodus at 480 years before the building of the Temple in Jerusalem by Solomon. Therefore he argued that Thutmose III (1501-1447) was responsible for the enslavement of the Hebrews, and that at his death in 1447 they made a successful attempt to throw off the yoke that had grown heavier than could be borne.

It will be seen from all these conflicting conjectures that the problem is one of great complexity, and in fact each of the theories suggested by way of a solution of it encounters almost insuperable difficulties in trying to reconcile the biblical traditions with the archaeological data. Thus, the date and details of the Israelite conquest and occupation of Palestine are still very obscure, and we cannot be certain who the Hyksos really were, or what exactly were their relations with the Hebrews. Professor Rowley has reviewed the evidence at present available in his recent Schweich Lectures, published in 1950 under the title *From Joseph to Joshua* (O.U.P.). Since the question is one of considerable importance, in view of the prominent position occupied by the Exodus in the religion of Israel, readers who wish to pursue it further should consult this volume, where references to the literature on the subject will be found.

### The God of the Hebrews

Some of the complications may have arisen from there having been more than one entry of Hebrews into Palestine, and from only one section of them—perhaps the Joseph tribes—having migrated to Egypt while the rest remained in Palestine. In its present form the Old Testament account of the conquest and settlement in the “Promised

Land", as recorded in the book of Joshua, was very largely the work of writers and editors in the southern kingdom of Judah, who, notwithstanding various discrepancies, represented the invasion as a single event under Joshua after the death of Moses. While all the traditions agree in making Moses the rallying point of the captive Hebrews and their consolidating centre after the Exodus, there is a divergence concerning the beginnings of the worship of the God of Israel under the name of Yahweh, incorrectly transliterated in the English authorized version of the Old Testament as "Jehovah" from the Hebrew consonants Y H W H.

In the oldest document, drawn up in Judah not later than the eighth century B.C., and commonly designated J, God was called by the name of Yahweh from the beginning of the human race in the garden of Eden. In the more or less contemporary document, called E, current in the kingdom of Israel in the north of Palestine, the revelation of the divine name was attributed to Moses at the burning bush in Midian when he was commanded to go to his captive countrymen in Egypt with a message of deliverance from the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, under the designation of Yahweh (Ex. iii.). This is confirmed by the priestly document (P) compiled after the return of the Jews from their exile in Babylon in the sixth century.

Although the origin of the divinity who was destined to become the national god of Israel and Judaism, and eventually to be made a synonym for Deity as we understand the concept today, is very obscure and uncertain, it would seem that Moses hardly could have gained a hearing from the Hebrew slaves in Egypt if he had appealed to them in the name of a god of whom they knew nothing. Since divine names like *Ya*, *Yami*, *Yahu* occur in a number of inscriptions, texts and documents more or less contemporary with the Mosaic period, it is not improbable that Yahweh was a familiar title of a Western Semitic deity at that time, especially among a Midianite clan known as Kenites living in the neighbourhood of Horeb, where the holy mountain, mistakenly identified with Sinai, was located. It was with them that Moses took up his abode for some

years when he fled from Egypt before returning to lead his oppressed brethren into the desert (Ex. ii. 15 ff.). There he kept the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro, who usually is thought to have been a priest of Yahweh (Ex. iii. 1, xviii. 11 f.). It may be, therefore, that it was Jethro who in the first instance brought Moses to a knowledge of Yahweh and instructed him in the worship of his Kenite god. Some scholars, however, think that Yahweh was of Arabic origin and that Jethro was converted to his cult by the proof of his power among the Israelites.

Whichever view is taken, he was not a native Hebrew god, and there can be little doubt that it was under the influence of Moses that he was adopted by the tribes he led out of Egypt. From being the god of this southern confederacy of "Hebrews" he gradually became the consolidating centre of Israel as a nation. When the various traditions were combined in the common narrative which we find in the Old Testament scriptures in their present form, Yahweh was represented as having made Israel the people of his choice, delivered them from bondage in Egypt, revealed himself to his servant Moses at the holy mountain, Horeb (called Sinai), and established a covenant relationship with them through their leader in the days of their wanderings in the desert. Although a great deal of this ancient tradition is contradictory, obscure and impossible to correlate with the available archaeological and historical evidence and contemporary chronology, the fact that a group of Hebrews lived in Egypt early in the second millennium B.C., were enslaved and eventually delivered by a leader in the person of Moses, can reasonably be assumed. Moreover, it was he who was primarily responsible for the introduction of the worship of Yahweh as the god who had brought these mighty things to pass on their behalf. In the southern kingdom of Judah it was believed apparently that Yahweh always had been worshipped from the very threshold of creation. In the northern tradition it was not until he revealed himself to Moses that the cultus was established. This discrepancy may be explained on the grounds that among the southern tribes he was in fact known before Moses appeared on the scene, either as an

ancient Kenite deity, or as an Arabian tribal god, whereas elsewhere he was adopted at a later period and so attributed solely to a Mosaic revelation. But once this was accomplished, Israel regarded itself as being in a peculiar covenant relationship with him by virtue of its response to his adoption.

### **The Covenant and the Monarchy**

How very deeply laid was this conviction is shown by the unique position which Yahweh henceforth occupied in the nation. As the tribal gods of the early Hebrews were absorbed in the one God of the Yahweh confederacy, and the power and prestige of the confederate deity grew, gradually he alone held absolute dominion over Israel as a whole. Notwithstanding his desert antecedents he retained his supremacy after the settlement in Palestine and the adoption of an agricultural way of life, in spite of the powerful influence and attractions of the indigenous vegetation cults. It is true the nature and attributes of the Palestinian baals were transferred to Yahweh, and the worship at the local sanctuaries often was practically the same as it had been under the former Canaanite divine occupant of the shrine. The struggle, in fact, between the two religions went on until Israel was again carried away into captivity, this time into Mesopotamia, at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. This was shown very clearly by the Hebrew prophets two centuries earlier who in no unmeasured terms denounced the corruptions that prevailed in their day and the inevitable consequences for the nation. Nevertheless, Palestine officially was "the land of Yahweh" and in it he was the consolidating centre of a theocracy unified religiously and politically in his worship and under his jurisdiction.

The bond between the nation and its god was dependent upon the observance of the Covenant and its cultus, the first condition of which was absolute loyalty to Yahweh, and to him alone, and explicit obedience to his commands. If this ideal of the prophets and their successors was never realized until the dissolution of the monarchy, it was inherent in the earlier tradition. While the ethical monothe-

ism of the prophetic type is of relatively late occurrence—subsequent, that is to say, to the Hebrew conquest and occupation of Palestine and the establishment of a unified rule of north and south under David—Moses had succeeded in securing the allegiance of a number of tribes to one god, viz. Yahweh, in the capacity of a confederate deity, without denying the existence of other tribal gods outside his jurisdiction. It was not until the early days of the monarchy that he assumed a wider rule over Israel as a unified theocratic state, and even then the local gods, reduced to a subordinate position, were thought to fulfil very urgent needs in respect of the control of the weather and similar functions. In this anomalous situation he was a jealous god who insisted on the unswerving allegiance of his people even though foreign queens and princesses might have their own temples and worship (1 Kgs. xi. 3 f., xviii. 19). Indeed, the creation of the monarchy is said to have been an affront to Yahweh (1 Sam. viii. 4 ff.; Hos. x. 9, xiii. 10) and a breach of the Covenant.

Here, however, it may be that our narratives have been distorted, since they were compiled when prophetic influences were strongly felt. The eighth-century prophets looked upon the monarchy with the gravest suspicion because, as has been explained, the kingship in the surrounding countries was so very closely connected with vegetation ritual. Therefore they saw in the institution a challenge to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel based on the Covenant which they maintained had been made first with Abraham and then with Moses. This theocratic relationship was with the god who had adopted the Hebrew people, not with a sacred king as the focal point in the social structure, as in Egypt, or as the deified bridegroom of the Mother-goddess as in Mesopotamia, and possibly in the Canaanite cultus.

The demand for a monarchy was made for the purpose of resisting the attacks of the Philistines and Ammonites. While Saul and David and their successors reigned as "the Lord's anointed", and exercised sacrificial functions like the divine kings in the neighbouring countries in the Fertile Crescent, they were never regarded as the incarna-

tion of Yahweh, or his deified servant. God was always over and above the world and the processes of nature. Thus, the personal name, Yahweh, by which Moses is said to have designated the deity to whose service he was called, suggested the concept of divine transcendence. The phrase "I am that I am" (Ex. iii. 14) would seem to contain the idea of pure Being—"He Who is", or "He Who causes to be", the ever-present Creator and Sustainer of all things, ineffable, indefinable, inconceivable, the only ground of all existence. It is not likely, of course, that so high a degree of abstraction was attached to the divine name when it was first associated with the god of Israel, though such a conception of Deity was not very different from that connected with Ptah in ancient Egyptian thought. Nevertheless, Hebrew monotheism, as it found expression in the prophets, was born of the conviction that the god who had revealed himself to the ancestors of the nation in the time of adversity and brought them out of the desert into the "Promised Land", overruled all things in accordance with his will and purposes. These mighty deeds were done long before the monarchy, and so Hebrew kings could scarcely be regarded as mediators between the nation and its gods, as in the other civilizations of the Ancient Middle East.

When eventually a covenant was made between Yahweh and the house of David, the northern kingdom did not hesitate to repudiate its inheritance in the son of Jesse after his grandson Rehoboam refused to listen to their complaints (1 Kgs. xii. 12, 16). This, of course, in the southern tradition (J), is represented as a major "sin" on the part of Jeroboam I, but, nevertheless, Yahwism was established as the official religion in the north as well as in the south because the Covenant was independent of any earthly dynasty. Consequently, the fall of the monarchy—first in Israel with the capture of Samaria by the Assyrians in 721 B.C., and then in Judah in 587 B.C. when the Chaldaeans completed the "Exile"—had little effect on the religious life of Judaism. Kings ruled by divine permission and the will of the people, and their throne was secure only so long as the occupant was faithful in the discharge of



his duties. Up to a point the monarch "could do no wrong", as in other ancient courts (1 Sam. viii. 11 f.; 1 Kgs. xxi), but his absolute power was limited by the supremacy of the will of Yahweh. As his mouthpiece, seers and prophets rebuked reigning sovereigns in the name of the Lord, pronounced divine judgments upon them, and at last foretold the dissolution of the monarchy as an institution in consequence of its failure to fulfil its purposes in the theocratic state.

### The Temple

So long as it endured, kings offered sacrifice, wore the mysterious priestly garment called the ephod, officiated at religious ceremonies in connexion with the sacred Ark of the Covenant and prophesied. With the building of the Temple at Jerusalem in the reign of Solomon a complete break was made with the desert tradition which maintained that Yahweh must dwell "in a tent and in a tabernacle" and not in a house of cedar (2 Sam. vii. 1-7). Acting on the principle that a great king must have a magnificent shrine in which to worship and to perform his sacred functions, no labour or expense was spared in erecting for Yahweh and his Ark an abode on Mount Zion worthy of his divine majesty but equally reflecting the glory of the nation and its ruler, Solomon, to whose palace it was attached, very much as the great basilica of St. Peter's at Rome, the mother-church of Western Christendom, is an appendage to the Vatican and stands within its precincts.

The design, executed by a Tyrian architect, followed that of the temples in Egypt and Phoenicia, and the work was carried out mainly by foreign artisans. Moreover, it was furnished and equipped with the same ornaments, emblems and decorations. Exactly how the worship in it was conducted, and to whom it was addressed, we do not know because the accounts of the services in the Old Testament narratives have been edited by later monotheists who have removed every reference they found that conflicted with their own faith and practice. But their tirades against the local sanctuaries in other parts of the country which were similarly appointed leave little room for doubt that the

temple worship at Jerusalem was much the same in its general character as that which was practised in Egypt, Phoenicia and Ras Shamra in Syria.

If this were so, then, as the ground-plan, pillars, furnishings and decorations suggest, together with the denunciations of alien cults by later writers in the Old Testament, Egyptian solar rites, Canaanite sacrifices and the serpent-cult, Mesopotamian cosmic ceremonial and lamentations for Tammuz, were practised in this royal chapel, where an Assyrian altar in three stages like an Akkadian or Sumerian ziqquarat, or temple-tower, was erected by Ahaz (2 Kgs. xvi. 10-15). It was in this polytheistic setting that the Ark was enshrined amid the gods of the surrounding nations, and their worship under the special protection of the king, as well as in the shrines which Solomon built for his foreign wives. That Yahweh survived as the only legitimate god in Israel, and eventually became recognised as the sole universal Ruler of the universe, is the remarkable achievement of Hebrew religion. Behind all the vicissitudes of its checkered history, the Covenant remained the one permanent basic reality. The monarchy might rise and fall, the national inheritance in the land of its promised possession might be temporarily lost, but Israel's Covenant relationship with its god remained. It was this which gave stability to the social structure and religious organization that elsewhere in the Ancient Middle East was supplied by the sacred kingship.

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## CHAPTER III

### THE RELIGIONS OF INDIA

PASSING eastwards from the Fertile Crescent through Asia Minor, the highlands of Persia constitute the natural position for a common home of the cultural achievements in the Ancient Near East in the fourth millennium B.C. It was there that the first civilization of Elam developed, and it may well have been the centre from which cultural movements and religious influences radiated across the Zagros mountains into Mesopotamia, and through Baluchistan and the Himalayas to western India. Thus, as a result of excavations carried out in the Punjab and the Indus valley since 1922, we now know that a remarkable homogeneous urban culture was established there between 3000 and 2000 B.C., which was derived from the small farming villages of Baluchistan, coming ultimately from western Persia and the Fertile Crescent. The sites from which most of our information comes are those of the ancient cities of Harappa, situated on the left bank of the river Ravi, the prehistoric capital of the Punjab, and Mohenjo-daro on the right bank of the Indus, four hundred miles to the south-west in Sind, together with Chanhu-daro in the same province.

#### **The Indus Valley Civilization and its Religion**

Like the contemporary settlements of Egypt and Mesopotamia, these two cities were grouped round great rivers and the broad fertile plains (i.e. Lārkāna, between the Indus and the Kohistan or Kirthar hills), and depended upon the annual inundation for their irrigation. When the snows melted at its source in the summer the Indus was liable to flood, and to cope with this situation an elaborate drainage system had been devised in the ruined cities. At Mohenjo-daro some of the buildings had been raised on platforms and artificial hills. The town-planning was of a high order, with wide streets, sanitation, a citadel, and

houses arranged in parallel rows, on strictly "utility" lines, reminding Sir John Marshall, when he excavated the site in 1922, of a modern cotton town in Lancashire, while Professor Piggott likens it to contemporary coolie lines. Some of the houses, however, were built round a courtyard equipped with staircases, lack-rooms, lavatories and rubbish-chutes.

To the west of the mound, on which now stands a small Buddhist *stupa* and monastery, was a great bath described by Sir John Marshall as "a vast hydropathic establishment" (Fig. 11). It is more likely, however, that it was originally part of the citadel which, as Sir Mortimer Wheeler says, was "a centre of religious or administrative life on a significant scale". If this is the correct interpretation, as is very probable, like so many other ancient sanctuaries it retained its sacredness through the ages. So a Buddhist monastery and mud-brick reliquary, or *stupa*, and its court were erected on the mound in the third or fourth centuries A.D., while adjacent to it were the remains of what may have been the place where ceremonial ablutions were performed, as in Hindu temples today. The eight small rooms in the cloister surrounding the bath, each with a cell above, may have been used by the priests engaged in the water-cult in the central sanctuary. The whole arrangement suggests that it was designed for members of a priestly order, each living in a cell above his bathroom with its paved floor, and entered by a private staircase. No doubt it was the duty of the priests to perform their ablutions at the appointed times, and to officiate at the large public gatherings held there on great ceremonial occasions. Here, then, in all probability may be seen the prototype of the purification by water which has become such a prominent feature in Hindu India, particularly in the form of ritual bathing in sacred streams.

Although the actual temple below the *stupa*, if it exists, has not yet been identified, the general character of the citadel area at Mohenjo-daro dispels the earlier conjecture that the Indus valley (or Harappa) civilization was a peaceful democratic régime devoid of fortifications, temple-towers and all the other military, social and religious

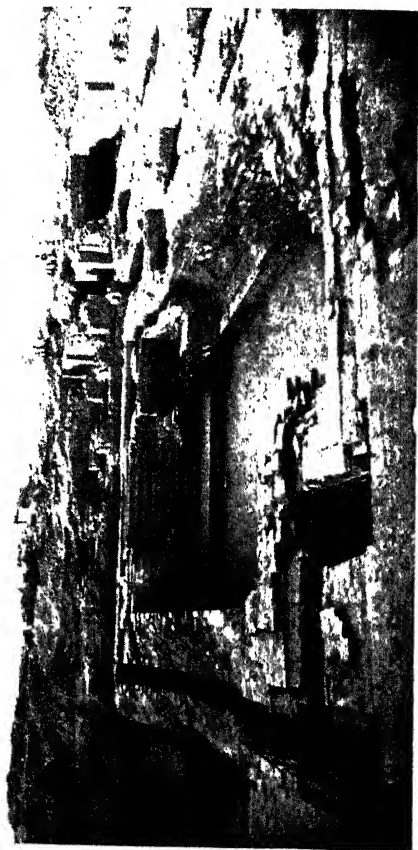


FIG. 11.—The Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro.

devices of the sacred kingship of the Middle East. Further observation has now convinced Sir Mortimer Wheeler that in fact a "citadel-rule" prevailed in this region, as in ancient Sumer, with massive defences and all the indications of centralized autocratic power exercising a unified sovereignty over the Northern and Southern kingdoms (i.e. those centred round Harappa and Mohenjo-daro) from the two main seats of government with a theocratic ultimate authority. This is suggested by the uniformity of the ground plan and equipment in the cities, the civic and religious focus in the temple-citadel, and the carefully ordered secular administration under divine sanction along the lines followed by the priest-kings in Mesopotamia.

Moreover, it would seem that the sacred kingship was intimately associated with the worship of the Mother-goddess, as it was in Babylonia. Some of the more pretentious buildings at Mohenjo-daro may have been shrines erected in her honour, and in almost every house apparently there were pottery figures of the female deity, identical in appearance with those of the Great Mother in the Ancient Near East, and in function with the innumerable village goddesses in India venerated as the givers of life and fertility; personifications, in fact, of the female principle called in Hinduism *Sakti*.

Even more significant for a study of Hinduism are the figures of a male god with horns and three faces, seated on a stool with his heels pressed closely together in the position of a *yogi* in a state of profound meditation, Fig. 12. On one seal he is surrounded by two deer or antelopes, a rhinoceros, an elephant, a tiger and a buffalo, with a fan-shaped erection between the horns resembling those of a buffalo or bull. Here it would seem we have a prototype of the great Indian god Shiva as Lord of the Beasts (*Pasupati*), so often depicted with several faces. He was one of the most ancient of the Hindu gods, and in the capacity of the Destroyer he had his place with Brahma, the Creator, and Vishnu, the Pre-

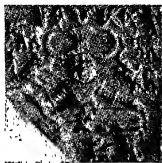


FIG. 12.—The Cross-Legged Figure at Mohenjo-daro.

server, in the great Triad (Fig. 13). His character was highly complex as he absorbed the functions of a number of gods as did Re in Egypt. Although he was associated specially with destructiveness, he was also identified with the processes of reproduction as the author and giver of life. Therefore, he was symbolized by the linga and yoni, the conventional emblems of the male and female generative organs. Since phallic symbols, typified by conical stones, have been found at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, together with large stone rings thought to be yonis, the worship of a fertility or vegetation god analogous with Shiva, personifying the reproductive powers of nature, was so firmly established in the Indus valley civilization that it became a permanent element in Indian religion. Sir John Marshall, in fact, does not hesitate to say that the religion of the Indus people "is so characteristically Indian as hardly to be distinguishable from still living Hinduism, or at least from that aspect of it which is bound up with animism and the cults of Siva and the Mother-goddess—still the two most potent forces in popular worship".

It may be concluded, therefore, that the beginnings of Hinduism must be sought in this very ancient civilization, which had a long period of development behind it before it became established in north-western India. In the third millennium B.C. three great streams of culture—those of Mesopotamia, Elam and the Indus valley—converged, the cradleland of which was somewhere between Sumer in Mesopotamia and India, probably in the Iranian highlands. It was in the Indus cities, where life continued little changed from about 2500 B.C. until they were deserted and left in ruins rather more than a thousand years later, that the foundations of some of the characteristic features of Hinduism were laid. Then came, about 1500 B.C., a very different religious tradition, introduced by those tall, light-skinned people of Indo-European stock and language who called themselves Aryans. They poured over the passes of the Hindu Kush mountains into the north-west of India, and in all probability found the earlier cities in ruins, since apparently they had been destroyed by barbarians from the west before the Aryan invasion. But it was the coin-



FIG. 13.—The Three-Faced God.



cidence of this influx from the north-west with the movement of people eastwards into the Indus valley and the surrounding district, breaking up the solidarity of the static urban civilization, that opened the way for the welding together of a variety of cultures in a common religious tradition under the consolidating influence of Hinduism.

### The Coming of the Aryans

The origin of this Indo-European people and their language has long been a matter of debate, not least in recent years when the Nazis in Germany gave it a particular political significance. Putting nationalism and politics on one side, the most probable Aryan cradleland is on the southern Russian steppes and east of the Caspian Sea, where in the second millennium B.C. the horse was tamed by partly nomadic agriculturists who developed a warrior type of culture. If they lived in small settlements cultivating grain and keeping flocks and herds, they were not city-dwellers. Their social organization was tribal and their religion a form of nature worship, thereby differentiating them from the Indus valley's complicated urban civilization with its Mother-goddess and her fertility ritual and rule by priest-kings. In speech they spoke the same kind of language (i.e. Sanskrit) as their counterparts in Europe who introduced what are called the *centum* linguistic group comprising Latin, Greek, Celtic, Teutonic and the Germanic and Slavonic tongues. Since they called themselves *Aryas* ("noble"), from which is derived "Iran", both they and their language have been known as Aryan, or Indo-European. Therefore, although "Aryan" is really a linguistic title like "Semitic", it does in fact represent a group of people who made their way into India and Europe in two divisions from their common home, which, as has been suggested, probably was situated in the region between Southern Russia and Turkestan, in the middle of the second millennium B.C. (i.e. c. 1500).

It was they who were responsible for the introduction of a new type of culture and religious belief in India when they settled in the Punjab in small village groups with their flock and herds, and later moved eastwards. Each was

ruled by a chieftain, or *rajah*, whose office was hereditary, and by contrast with the darker-skinned earlier inhabitants whom they described as *dasa* (a term of reproach which came to mean "slave" in Sanskrit), they declared themselves to be of "noble" birth and descent—that is to say, *Aryas*. Yet it was apparently the fusion of the Indus civilization with the Aryan culture and its language that gave rise to the higher developments in religion, philosophy, mysticism, literature and ethics in India. The successive invasions, each of which increased the divergence between the newcomers and the earlier inhabitants, made it necessary to organize and rationalize all these various and diverse cultural, religious and linguistic groups within a single social structure with properly defined relationships. It was for this purpose that the Hindu caste system eventually came into vogue, and has remained a characteristic feature of Indian religious and social organization.

### The Caste System

It arose apparently gradually, since there is no mention of it in the sacred literature known as the Vedas of about 1000 B.C. By the fifth century B.C. it was fairly prevalent. For two centuries before this the Aryans in the Ganges valley had become the upper level of the population in a number of districts ruled by hereditary *rajahs*, with non-Aryans as a depressed class. Although there was no hard-and-fast separation between them, four distinct social groups were in process of formation—the *Kshatriyas* or nobles and warriors; the *Brahmins* or priests; the *Vaisyas* or merchants, peasants and artisans, and the *Sudras* or non-Aryan serfs. Moreover, the first three were tending to separate themselves from the dark-skinned non-Aryans. It was this colour bar that gave its name to the caste system, for the Hindu word for "caste" is *varna*, meaning "colour". In practice, however, almost every aspect of daily life has been canalized by it in respect of heredity and occupation with inflexible rules governing intermarriage, social intimacies like drinking from the same cup or sharing the same meal, and other food restrictions including their preparation, the acceptance of water, the use of roads, schools

and temples, and the clothes worn. Outside these four castes, as the system has become more rigidly developed and enforced, a considerable section of the nation, estimated at some fifty-five million, has been excluded altogether as "exterior" or "outcastes", including a group of "untouchables". These are engaged in ceremonially unclean and defiling occupations, such as scavenging, washing clothes and tanning leather, and in consequence they are forbidden to have direct intercourse with caste Hindus.

According to the traditional view set forth in the Code of Manu, composed as a collection of rules of life about 200 B.C., all caste Hindus belong to one of the four *varnas*, which are supposed to have sprung from the body of the Creator. By virtue of this divine origin each of the divisions must remain distinct from each other in their respective groups from birth to death without any interaction between their members. But in fact the castes have broken up into a number of subdivisions, and some of them have changed their nature and functions very considerably, so that even marriage between lower and higher sub-castes has been permitted, sometimes under fluid conditions. Food restrictions have been more rigidly observed than those governing clothing, but, notwithstanding certain deviations and modifications, the system has produced a static social structure in which status and occupation have been fixed on an hereditary basis which, under the influence of the doctrine of reincarnation, has restricted a change in fortunes to some future rebirth. In this present life an individual is forced to remain in the place in society in which he is born, with its prescribed duties and occupation, while girls are betrothed to their future husbands in infancy, or even before birth, in accordance with caste rules.

### The Religion of the Vedas

That it has exercised an enormous influence on religious, cultural and political stability cannot be denied, maintaining from generation to generation a continuous tradition in which unity has been secured through the balance and co-operation of all the members of the community regarded

as vital parts of the body of the Creator. It was not, however, until the Aryans had given up their nomadic way of life and settled in the enervating Ganges valley that they abandoned their earlier pastoral culture and robust optimism for a static world-denying social and political philosophy finding expression in the caste system, the law of karma and the doctrine of reincarnation. In their earlier hymns, those of the Rig-veda,<sup>1</sup> a very different picture of tribal life occurs, organized loosely into groups of related families or clans, each tribe ruled by its king and worshipping a number of nature gods, such as Dyaus Pitar the supreme Being in the sky, Varuna the all-encompassing Heavens, Surya the sun, Ushas the dawn, Indra the storm, Agni the fire, and the Maruts the winds.

Thus, when they first came into India the Aryans were just typical pastoral polytheistic people indistinguishable in these respects from the rest of their proto-Nordic stock south-east of the Caucasus. This seems to have continued during the period covered by the Vedic sacred literature from the latter part of the second millennium B.C. until towards the end of the seventh century B.C., when the Brahmins, as a priestly caste, came to dominate the situation more and more, as the masters of sacrifice on which all existence in heaven and on earth depended. In the meantime, however, thought and practice had been moving away from the earlier optimistic polytheistic tradition in a pantheistic direction.

At first the various aspects of nature were worshipped and venerated under the form of the gods in which they were personified, some of whom were very ancient divinities like Dyaus Pitar, the prototype of the Greek Zeus and the Roman Juppiter, or Indra, who came into great prominence as the god of storms and of war when he reached India. In their original home the Aryans had made an intoxicating liquor which they called Soma, squeezed from

<sup>1</sup>*Veda* is a Sanskrit word meaning "knowledge" or "wisdom", and includes a very large number of texts of which the earliest is the collection of over a thousand hymns used as prayers and spells in ten books called the Rig-veda, or Veda of praises, written down about the eighth century B.C. but composed not later than 1000 B.C. (cf. Chap. viii., pp. 221).

a sacred plant and drunk as a supernatural beverage like nectar among the Greeks or kava in Polynesia. It was known to the early inhabitants of Iran as Haoma, and it was offered to the gods as a libation until at length it was personified as itself the god Soma, whose presence was thought to be necessary in the offering of sacrifice. The crushing of the leaves of the plant between stones to obtain the intoxicating juice was regarded as the immolation of the god, King Soma. Similarly, no sacrifice was effectual without the presence of Agni, the sacred fire in whose purifying flame "sin" and "guilt", in the Hindu sense, were removed.

### **Brahmanism**

The sustainer of the natural order and the upholder of the moral law was Varuna, who exercised his functions as an all-pervading divine power through a mysterious abstract principle called Rta, governing alike the universe and the gods. The sacred fire was thought to be its charioteer who "harnesses the steeds and holds the reins of Rta", because it was the sacrificial offering, of which Agni was the supreme Lord, that became more and more the means by which all things in heaven and on earth were maintained. Varuna was the ethical aspect of this order, and the right and the true were brought together in the symbol of fire. Both were under the control of the king and the priests, and Agni became the mediator between heaven and earth. It was then the function of the presiding priest, known as Brahmin (because he was the manipulator of the sacred power (Brahman) immanent in the priest, the sacrifice and the inspired utterance), to build the fire-altar consisting of a number of bricks erected in seven layers in the form of a falcon, representing the structure of the universe, the body of Agni and the Vedas. As the priests constructed the altar brick by brick they repeated, it was believed, the process of creation. When the ceremony had been completed and the sacrifice offered, the unity of creation was restored and the body of the Creator was brought back to life, like the reanimated mummy of Osiris in Egypt.

By the end of the seventh century B.C. the Brahmins had

become so firmly established in the caste system as the masters of the sacrificial ritual and the sacred knowledge (Veda) on which everything in heaven and earth depended, that they had attained a unique position of power and privilege in society. Some of the rites took weeks or months to perform with the absolute accuracy on which their efficacy depended. The horse sacrifice, in fact, extended over more than a year. All this required elaborate training and minute directions in the conduct of the services, together with some explanation of the significance of the things said and done in the form of commentaries. Thus, in course of time (i.e. by about 700 B.C.) a voluminous body of prose literature, the Brahmanas, became attached to the four Vedas to describe, explain and give practical directions for the performance of the sacrificial rites, mainly as text-books of the different schools of Brahmins. They have now been collected and translated in the Sacred Books of the East. If they do not constitute exactly exciting reading they are a very valuable source of information not only about the priestly office and its duties but also concerning the way in which thought moved in Hinduism in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.

In these texts the most prominent figure is the god Prajapati, the Lord of Production and the personification of the creative principle, at once Creator and creation. He fulfilled his creative operations through the universal cosmic and moral order, Rta, and by the sacrifice of himself at the hands of the gods the universe came into being as so many parts of his body. Having produced the waters, the sun, the stars and the earth, he created the animals and man, and finally the gods. It was this creative process that was renewed by the priests in their sacrificial ritual, for we are told in the Satapatha-Brahmana that "the sacrificer is the god Prajapati at his own sacrifice". In becoming the sacrifice the sacrificer was united with the universe in all its parts, and the whole creation was resolved into a unity and sustained by the offering wherein the body of the Creator (Prajapati) was broken anew and restored for the conservation of the world.

## The Upanishads

It was along this line of thought, which is not very easy for Western minds to understand, that one of the greatest speculative eras in the history of religion was introduced. In the Brahmana texts Prajapati, the Lord of Creation, is said to have reproduced himself by means of a golden egg, and from this Brahman emerged as a neuter impersonal creative principle. *Brahman*, as has been explained, was the name given to the supernatural power, or *mana*, operative in the spoken word (Veda) and in cosmic activity (Rta) generated by the sacrificial ritual. It covers, therefore, the magical spell, the sacred rite, the universal divine order beyond the gods, pervading the universe and creating and governing all existence. Now it was but a step from this conception of Brahman to that of a pantheistic Absolute existing by and in itself without having relation to any other being along with it, so that God and the universe are one and the same. Brahman by definition is *advitīyam*, "without a second". Therefore, it is quite impossible for human beings to have any personal relations or union with a "One" which is the sum total of all existence, because union implies something other than itself with which the "One", or Absolute, can be united.

This pantheistic doctrine was developed and systematized by a remarkable group of mystics who from about 600 B.C. lived as hermits in the forests and compiled a number of very difficult treatises known as the *Upanishads*, a term meaning "sitting near a teacher" in the sense of pupils gathering round their master. The object of the "session" was to discover the Ultimate Reality (i.e. the Absolute) in which the universe exists, and also the true meaning of human life. The movement being very largely a reaction against the pretensions and sacrificial teaching of the Brahmins and the Brahmanas, it may have arisen out of the different approaches to the problem by the priests and princes of ancient India. Thus, in some of the earlier Upanishads a deep-seated antagonism to the Brahmanic ritual order is quite explicit, and the new doctrines of the universe are ascribed to royal personages from whom the

Brahmins are represented as seeking instruction. But the divergence more often appears in the substitution of an allegorical for a literal interpretation of the rites. For example, the horse sacrifice becomes an act of meditation in which the universe is offered mystically by the contemplative in place of the horse, and by a supreme act of renunciation the Reality as it manifests itself in the divine element in man, called the Atman, is united with the cosmic divine Reality, the Brahman. Indeed, the aim of the Upanishadic teachers was to establish a "way of knowledge" which would enable those who adopted the prescribed meditative technique to attain at length complete identity with the One Ultimate Reality which underlies all existence (i.e. Brahman). This is summed up in the Chandogya Upanishad in the phrase *tat tvam asi*, "That art that", meaning that the individual soul (Atman) has realized its identity with Brahman the unqualifiable Absolute. Then, and only then, is release possible from all the hampering conditions of life in the phenomenal world of time and space which is ultimately illusory. When this state of bliss is reached, the passionless peace of Nirvana is attained, meaning literally "blowing out" or "becoming cool", a Buddhist ideal hardly different from the Upanishadic liberation (*mokṣa*).

### Reincarnation and the Law of Karma

Absorption in the Absolute, however, is a very long and tedious process which normally requires a number of rebirths. This is known as "wandering" (*samsāra*), or transmigration, because so long as the soul (*atman*) is a prisoner within its body it is destined to be reborn in another earthly body, either in a higher or a lower form of life, depending upon the deeds (*karma*) done in the previous existence. Although the doctrine of reincarnation has been a recurrent belief in the history of religion throughout the ages, the law of Karma is peculiar to India. According to this belief human destiny is determined by an inexorable law of action and reaction, called karma, until release (*mokṣa*) is secured and the wandering stream of life (*samsāra*) brought to an end. All thoughts, words and deeds have their con-



sequences in fixing one's lot in the future existences. Therefore, each life with all its pleasures and pains is the necessary result of the actions of past lives and becomes in turn the cause through its own activities of future births. What a man sows that he reaps in subsequent returns to the earth in a new body, be it that of a mystic, an outcast, a dog or a swine. Therefore, it behoves him to practise good works, mental discipline and such techniques of meditation and concentration on pure thought as those prescribed in the Yoga system, with a view to experiencing complete identity of the Self (Atman) with Brahman at the earliest possible moment and so to contract out of the cycle of birth and rebirth altogether.

The methods to be adopted to achieve this end have varied considerably in different periods and in different schools. While the "Way of Knowledge" (*Jnana-marga*), for instance, has found practical expression in the Yoga system, the "Way of Works" (*Karma-marga*) has been widely practised in the observance of the traditional rites and duties in the hope of thereby amassing favourable and meritorious Karma. In the Vedantic schools and the later Upanishads there was, in fact, a tendency to revert to the earlier Vedic ceremonial, and to the principal gods of the sacrificial system, in an attempt to bring together the most ancient scriptures (the Vedas), the Brahmanic ritual order, the ascetic ideal (*tapas*) and the Way of Knowledge (*Jnana-marga*). The ritual having ceased to be a priestly device to uphold the universe, it now became a means of purifying the heart and of securing emancipation (*moksa*). Even in the most orthodox school of the Way of Works (*Karma-marga*) the rites and ceremonies were only a means of acquiring enough merit to pass at death into one of the many heavens, or to be reborn as a Brahmin, in the journey towards the final union with Brahman which was still the ultimate goal.

### Sectarian Hinduism

Meanwhile, in popular Hinduism there had been an increasing tendency to regard one or other of the Vedic gods as an object of personal devotion—a bhagavat eliciting ardent love, or Bhakti, in grateful response to the benefits

conferred. This Way of Devotion (*Bhaktimarga*) had become established by 200 B.C. as a sectarian movement around two great gods, Vishnu and Shiva, who, as has been explained, appear to have had their antecedents in the Indus civilization far back in the second millennium B.C. Therefore, although it emerged at a comparatively late date, Bhakti in all probability was a very ancient faith which was revived in the Maurya period (from about 322 to 185 B.C.), when invasions from Central Asia produced profound changes in the religion and culture of India. In this welter of new ideas and influences a number of gods, some of aboriginal or local origin, others introduced from Aryan or non-Aryan sources, found a consolidating centre in Vishnu or Shiva. Therefore, their respective sects, called Vaishnavism and Saivism, were a conglomeration of monotheism, polytheism and pantheism. What is now called Hinduism is really the result of this mingling of heterogenous elements in a composite system of belief and practice.

The Way of Knowledge, in either its monistic (Upanishadic) or dualistic (Sankhya) form, has remained the basis of the orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy which took shape from 500 B.C. to A.D. 500, and from it, as we shall see, two reforms arose, one of which was destined to have far-reaching effects on the history of religion. Nevertheless, it was too abstract, obscure and mystical to meet the spiritual needs of the common man. Therefore, without denying the truth or efficacy of the Way of Knowledge and the Way of Works, for those who were capable of rising to the heights of mystical experience, they presupposed, for the practical purposes of religion, the ordinary Hindu has turned to one or other of the Bhakti sects in search of a way of salvation, very much as in Christianity Christ and the cultus of the saints have been the popular devotional centres rather than the incomprehensibility of the triune Godhead lying in the background of the more personal and intimate faith and practice of devotional religion. Thus, the two great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, present Hinduism in its popular guise in terms of personal devotion.

The Ramayana, as the name suggests, records the adventures of Rama told in more than 24,000 couplets by the poet Valmiki in the fourth century B.C., to which the first and seventh books were added much later (c. second century A.D.). The hero is a gallant figure rather like Sir Galahad in the Arthurian legend. He was happily married to his wife Sita, a charming princess, when she was abducted by the demon-king of Ceylon. Rama thereupon enlisted the aid of the monkey-king, who from the tree-tops discovered her whereabouts, and eventually the husband and wife were reunited. This simple story, considerably elaborated in the narrative by the incorporation of a number of popular tales, developed into the legend of a cult not only venerating Rama as an avatar, or "descent", of Vishnu, but worshipping him as the Supreme God who saves those who cling to him as a baby-monkey clings to its mother, or else carries his chosen ones as a cat carries her kittens by the scruff of the neck.

The Mahabharata is an enormous epic containing 100,000 couplets, composed between 400 B.C. and A.D. 400, describing a fratricidal struggle between two families of cousins, both descended from the same great-grandfather, Kuru. After eighteen days of bitter fighting the Kurus were destroyed and their rivals, the Pandavas, reigned over the kingdom until eventually they ascended to heaven. Arjuna, the leader of the family of Pandavas, hesitated, however, on the eve of battle to engage in warfare with his kith and kin. His charioteer, Krishna, thereupon explained to him that caste duties must be fulfilled at whatever cost, and assured him by reminding him that the soul cannot be slain.

### The Gita

It is this dialogue that is recorded in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, "the Song of the Blessed" One in the form of an allegory, which has become one of the classics of sacred literature. Like the medieval mystery play, *Everyman*, it tells the story of that inner conflict between wish and will in the quest of salvation. Krishna is represented as the incarnation, or avatar, of Vishnu, who begins by laying before Arjuna the

observances of caste. As a warrior he is bound to fight in a just war. Proceeding to the philosophical quest Krishna explains that absorption in the Absolute is attained by way of meditation leading to right action, the emphasis being placed upon activity, such as caste duty and the Way of Works. The principle of loving faith and personal devotion (Bhakti) is next shown to be the most important of all because thereby salvation is secured. By the surrender of the heart the soul is redeemed, and in words which have a ring of the Christian Gospel, the poem concludes with a passionate appeal as Krishna is transfigured into Vishnu before the awe-struck Arjuna, the eternal Brahma in God-form: "give thy mind to me, be devoted to me, sacrifice for me, honour me. Thus shalt thou come to me: truly do I promise it unto thee for thou art dear to me. Forsake all other duties and precepts and come unto me, I will liberate thee from sin, therefore be of good cheer".

Being a composite poem, the earliest sections of which date probably from 300 to 250 B.C., before it reached its present form in the second century A.D., the Gita had combined into one system all the current ways of salvation. In it are to be found some of the most sublime thoughts of the Upanishads united with the doctrines of Sankhya and Yoga superimposed on those of the Vedanta, and unified in a common devotion to Krishna as a personal saviour. It is, indeed, its comprehensiveness more than its beauty of language that has made it an eternal gospel, having a message for every man in every age. Thus, it has come to be regarded as the New Testament of Hinduism, being to Hindus what the Bible is to Christians and the Old Testament is to Jews and the Qur'an to Muslims. Works, faith, knowledge are each given a place in it, together with the doctrine of Bhakti, exalting the duties of caste above all other obligations. It is, in fact, a many-coloured woof shot across with a Bhakti warp.

The pattern, however, is too composite to be harmonious. Standing out most conspicuously are the threads of the dualistic Sankhya system which is almost as old as the monism of the Upanishads, and does not blend happily with the doctrine with Brahman as the single Ultimate

Reality. According to the Sankhya philosophy, which is attributed to Kapila who may have lived in the seventh century B.C., there are two eternal Realities, the one, matter or the world of appearances called *prakriti*, out of which existence, activity and the material body developed; the other, an infinite number of individual souls, each independent and eternal, called *purusha*. The *purusha* is a passive spectator of the misery of conscious life in this world because it is unaware of its spiritual nature. Being in bondage in its material body (*prakriti*), it imagines it is subject to the changes it experiences from birth to death. Salvation lies in the recognition of this fundamental mistake; not, as in the Upanishadic tradition, in establishing the identity of the Atman with Brahman. In short, the soul has to realize that it is only an onlooker, not an actor, in the drama of existence.

### Jainism

From this Sankhya system two important Hindu heresies arose as attempts to find a way of release from the law of Karma and the process of rebirth. The first was initiated by Vardhamana, the son of a chief of a Kshatriyas (warrior) clan, who was born about 540 B.C. near Vaisali. Dissatisfied with monistic idealism which resolved the world of everyday experience into an illusion, and repudiating the claims of the Brahmins, he concentrated attention on the association of the soul with the body, along Sankhya lines, as the fundamental ill. So long as the soul, which he called *Jiva*, is encased in layers of karma it can never understand that it is purely spiritual in nature and possesses unlimited wisdom, power and goodness. For twelve years he practised severe asceticisms, until at the age of forty-two he became Mahavira, "the Venerable One", by attaining full and complete spiritual knowledge (*kevala*). For the next thirty years he wandered about teaching his system and organizing the movement which derives its name from *Jina*, meaning one who has successfully conquered his passions and gained complete mastery over himself. To attain this goal and status the aspirants lived together in loosely organized religious communities which became

divided into two rival sections of "white robes" and "sky-clads", so named because the "white robes" wore clothes and the "sky clads" went about in a state of nature "clad only in atmosphere"!

Both these Orders sought liberation by the practice of austerities (*tapas*), intense meditation and severe control of the mind and passions. The killing of all living creatures was renounced, together with lying speech, stealing, sensuality and all earthly attachments. The laity who lived in the world took the same vows, except that for a celibate life a rule of chaste behaviour was substituted, and for complete renunciation the number of things in daily use was reduced to a bare minimum of essential requirements. This has meant their having to refuse to engage in an occupation, such as agriculture, butchery, fishing or brewing, which involves the taking of life in any form. Consequently, they have been compelled to adopt business careers as merchants, bankers, lawyers and land-owners. The restriction has proved to be economically to their advantage, and today the Jains are a prosperous well-to-do community, highly respected and very well conducted. But they have remained a small eclectic group of some one and a quarter million adherents, confined for the most part to the district around Bombay. To what extent they can be regarded as a religious organization is open to question, as the idea of God, or of an Absolute, finds no place at all in their discipline. Indeed, such a concept has always been repudiated altogether, faith being right knowledge about the relation between matter and mind, body and spirit, and its practical application in the proper course of conduct to be adopted to reach the goal of emancipation without any mediation between the temporal order and the eternal world.

## **Buddhism**

A generation later another movement arose contemporaneous with Jainism, having much in common with it but destined to become one of the major faiths of mankind. Like the Mahavira, Siddhartha, subsequently known as the Buddha, was born in the middle of the sixth century B.C.

as a member of an aristocratic family, Gautama of the Kshatriya caste. His father appears to have been a chieftain of the Sakya clan in northern India, about a hundred miles from Benares in the foothills of the Himalayas. But although a number of stories have grown up around his birth and childhood, little is known for certain concerning his upbringing. It would seem, however, that life at the home in which he was reared was, as Kenneth Saunders says, "not unlike that at a Scottish castle in the Middle Ages". He is said to have married before he was twenty, his bride being the daughter of a neighbouring chief, described as a "princess". A son was born of the marriage, but Siddhartha (or Gautama, as he is usually styled) in true Hindu fashion left home to find some way of overcoming the suffering and decay manifest in all earthly things around him, and to discover a higher and more enduring meaning in life and human destiny.

Having donned the yellow robes of an ascetic, he appears to have consulted in the first instance two Brahmins living in caves in the hills near Rajagaha, a royal city in the province of Magadha. Gaining little from them in the quest of enlightenment beyond subjective mystical abstraction—"the realm of nothingness" as the end of a life of meditation—after a short period of wandering he took up his abode in the depths of the forest in a grove at Uruvela. There for six years he practised increasingly incredible austerities, if the tradition is correct, until he nearly killed himself. Having become mere skin and bone as a result of his rigorous discipline, he, and the five other ascetics who had joined him, still failed to find the path to Enlightenment. Realizing the folly and futility of such asceticism, he left his companions and followed a "middle way" between unprofitable mortification and luxurious living.

### **The Enlightenment of the Buddha**

Setting out on an alms-pilgrimage through Magadha as a mendicant, he turned aside into a delightful grove at a place now called Budhgaya, marked by the Mahabodhi temple. There, sitting in yoga-fashion under a bodhi-tree near a clear flowing river, he determined to remain until

he attained Enlightenment. Having made his vow he relaxed his will, faced up to his former failures, and was rewarded by his great experience, enjoying for seven days the bliss of emancipation. The cause of all human misery, he realized, was desire (*tanha*), arising out of the will-to-live and the will-to-possess. Until this fact is recognized, no progress towards the peace of Nirvana can be made. Upon this basic principle Gautama, who had now become the Buddha, or "Enlightened One", enunciated his "Four Noble Truths" leading by way of the "Eightfold Path" to the insight and higher wisdom he had so strenuously struggled to attain.

Having in the background the Sankhya philosophy in which he had been trained, he began his diagnosis of all the ills to which flesh is heir with the universality of suffering, or *Dukka*, manifest in birth, old age, disease, death and rebirth. This was the first of the Four Truths. The second was the cause of suffering—namely, intense desire, or *Tanha*. To overcome desire for the wrong things all craving must be annihilated so that it no longer exists. Then, and only then, can the latent mental state of passionless peace be attained, called Nirvana in Sanskrit and Nibbana in Pali, the sacred language of ancient Buddhism. To this end, as the fourth Noble Truth affirms, the Eightfold Path must be followed. This consists in a right mental attitude (i.e. right understanding and aspiration), right conduct in speech, livelihood and ethical behaviour, right effort, thought and contemplation.

Instead of himself entering the bliss of Nirvana, the Buddha, on attaining Enlightenment, actuated by a compassionate love for suffering humanity, deliberately remained in this world in order to reveal his "middle way" as the method of self-salvation. He sought out the five ascetics with whom he had lived before he deserted them, and finding them in the Deer Park at Benares he expounded to them at some length his discovery. In this famous "sermon" the "royal chariot wheel of the truth was set rolling onwards by the Blessed One." For the rest of his life he devoted himself to the preaching of his *Dharma*, or Law, which for millions has become a saving truth and the most



convincing answer to the human problem, not only of his own time but throughout the ages.

### **The Middle Way**

The Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path did not in fact constitute very much more than a "middle way" between the Hindu quest of emancipation by knowledge and works, and the austere asceticism of the Jains to attain the same goal. The caste system was eliminated as were the Brahmanic ritual order, the monism of the Upanishads and, indeed, any conception of divinity, or of the self (atman) as an individualized permanent ego or soul. The doctrine of karma and the belief in reincarnation and transmigration retained the central position they had occupied in Hinduism, and, as in Jainism, the movement was essentially monastic, inasmuch as the Buddhist way of life really presupposed those who embraced it in its fullness living together in Religious Orders governed by a definite rule and discipline.

Provision, however, was made for a lay element, which, like that in Jainism, was committed to the four precepts against taking life, theft, falsehood and unchastity, in a somewhat modified form compatible with normal domestic life. Chastity, for example, was interpreted to mean fidelity in marriage, and the taking of life for food was permitted. Intoxicating drinks, gambling, frequenting of fairs, roaming the streets at unseemly hours, idling and associating with undesirable people were strictly forbidden. In short, the good layman was expected to live in a circumspect manner, and to support the monasteries by his alms. In these ways he laid up for himself merit, so that, while he could not hope for emancipation in this life, he might pass at death to one of the heavens, there to await rebirth in a higher state on his way to Nirvana.

### **The Unreality of the Self**

Where Buddhism differed fundamentally from Hinduism was in its interpretation of the nature of the "self". With the Mahavira the Buddha agreed that something

more than "right knowledge" was needed to stop the wheel of rebirth, but for Gautama it was karma not the soul that survived death. A human being was thought to be made up of an aggregate of five elements, or *skandhas*, of the life-impulse, comprising (1) the body and the senses, (2) the feelings and sensations, (3) sense-perceptions, (4) volitions and mental faculties, and (5) reason or consciousness. These collectively constitute the individual as a single being, but they are always changing from day to day, and at death the union is dissolved. What is called the soul, or ego, has no permanent or real existence, since human personality is only an aggregate of the *skandhas* as a chariot is merely the sum of its parts. The body is not the self because it can be involved in sickness against its own will. The same applies to the other elements in the functional unity which are continually in a state of "becoming", never "continuing in one stay" (to quote our burial service), and so devoid of permanence or eternal reality.

The idea of reincarnation and transmigration did not, of course, fit in very easily with this conception of what was called the *Anatta*, or "not-self" doctrine. All that passed over into the next birth was the karma that had been collected in this life. The recurrence of sensations and ideas gives the appearance of sameness, but actually it is only the continuity of a series of temporarily consolidated *skandhas*, or attachment-groups, masquerading as an ego or self. What transmigrates is a "stream of energy clothing itself in body after body" as the flame from one wick of a lamp may be passed on to another wick. All we really know or observe within ourselves, or in the world around us, are these ever-changing states of consciousness or awareness. Therefore, since everything is in a state of endless "becoming" there is no eternal "Being", no underlying Unity or Brahman as an Absolute, no permanent personality human or divine. Indeed, the permanency of the ego, or of the world of appearances, is the great illusion which must be renounced if deliverance from the wheel of perpetual becoming is ever to be attained. The will to live and to have, the thirst for sentient life with all its pain and misery, desires and fleeting pleasures, must be abandoned. Or in the Buddhist simile,

the oil that keeps the lamp alight must be consumed if the flame of life is to be extinguished.

Mrs. Rhys Davids, it is true, has maintained that the Buddha did not himself teach the negative doctrine of the unreality of the self (*Anatta*) attributed to him in the later canonical documents. He would not have attracted such an enthusiastic band of disciples and been able to launch a great movement, she thought, merely by teaching a *Dharma* of release from the painfulness of life, the illusion of a permanent ego and waning in Nirvana. But the *Anatta* doctrine, together with the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, is too fundamental as an original element in Buddhism to be dismissed lightly. The appeal lay in giving practical expression in a coherent system to the beliefs and desires of India in the sixth century B.C. and onwards, shorn of the metaphysical subtleties of mystical Hinduism and of the Brahmanic rituals and caste segmentation.

It was essentially, as it claimed, a "middle way" which, despite its interpretation of selfhood and the confusion this introduced into the doctrine of reincarnation, met the needs of suffering humanity weighed under the burden of *Dukkha*; a Pali word for which there is no exact English equivalent, embracing as it does every kind of disharmony with everyday existence, including not only the pain of the world but all its limitations, tensions, imperfections and transience. Whether or not the goal was absolute non-existence—and the Buddha steadfastly refused to commit himself to the doctrine of annihilation—the final end to be sought and attained when all the "fetters" had been cast off (e.g. the delusion of a permanent self, the tyranny of the senses, ill-will towards one's fellow-men) was emancipation from karma and the cessation of pain and sorrow in the transcendental peace of Nirvana.

## Nirvana

When the Buddha was accused of being a nihilist and preaching annihilation he is said to have declared, "that is what I am not and do not affirm. Both previously and now I preach pain and the cessation of pain." The body of the

*Tathagata*, or "truth-finder", he went on to explain, is passed away, and released from the aggregate that makes up his physical mode of existence (i.e. the *skandhas*). This is a state "profound, immeasurable, hard to fathom, like the ocean. It does not fit the case to say that he is re-born or not reborn", because Nirvana is a condition in which "there is an un-born, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. If there were not that which is not-born, not-become, not-made, not-compounded, there could be no escape for the born, become, made and compounded."

It was in these obscure and involved terms that the Buddha described the final goal as he conceived *Arahatship*, or sainthood (i.e. "one who is worthy"). After a long and tedious process of getting rid of all fetters one by one until the status of a "stream-winner" is achieved, the way is open for the final advance to higher insight (*sambodhi*) and thence to Nirvana, the negative condition of "becoming cool" as a flame or fire dies out for lack of fuel. This is hardly what the Western mind understands by completely coming to an end. Rather it is a psychological concept which has to be experienced as a state of higher "consciousness", or insight, beyond that of sentient life. The Buddha himself claimed to have had a foretaste of it at the moment of his Enlightenment, and although he was not able to define Nirvana he realized that it was the end of the earthly struggle with pain and desire; complete emancipation from all fetters and from the conceit of individuality.

### **The Mahayana and the Hinayana**

However attractive this quest of perfection might be in the peculiar climate of Indian thought, life interpreted as a series of "becomings" and "vanishings" conditioned by a law of continuous change in a world as worthless as it was illusory, had to meet a challenge from Hinduism after the fall of the Maurya dynasty (c. 185 B.C.) at the death of Asoka, the Buddhist Emperor of Magadha. The Brahmins, as we have seen, had worked out three ways of release from the law of karma; namely those of Works, Knowledge and

Devotion. While they accepted the Buddhist teaching concerning the quenching of the thirst for life as an essential requirement for entrance into Nirvana, they had devised their own scheme of self-salvation as an alternative to the Buddha's "middle way". Very soon a number of sects arose to give expression to these Brahmanic doctrines, conspicuous among which were those of the Bhakti movement with their fervent personal religion centred in the *avatars* of Vishnu and Shiva. As a result, in northern India in the changed climate of Hinduism, as Buddhism came more and more under a number of new foreign influences—Greek, Christian, Zoroastrian and Central Asian—Buddha became a living saviour-god, incarnate like Krishna and Rama, for the salvation of mankind. Gautama then came to be regarded as the latest of a series of "incarnations" of the eternal Buddha who had appeared on the earth in order to spread throughout the world the knowledge of salvation. In some form of existence in every age he had always lived, either on earth or in a heavenly sphere, because he was the Absolute at the heart of all things. Since the Buddha-nature was held to penetrate the entire universe, it could appear in a variety of forms and persons, and it was manifest supremely in the historical Gautama.

This transformation of the enlightened revealer of the Four Noble Truths into "a being of enlightenment", or *bodhisattva*, and finally into the saviour-god of all mankind, represents a long process of development which found its fullest expression in the Mahayana, or northern school. This claimed to be the "Great Vehicle" because it was large enough to bring all men to a state of salvation. In the south, especially in Ceylon, Burma and Thailand, a more conservative negative philosophy was retained, dubbed by the progressive Mahayanists the "Little Vehicle" (Hinayana), because it taught an incomplete doctrine and was content to practise an intense self-development suitable only for a monastic régime.

Although Hinayana maintained that it had preserved the original teaching and practice of the Buddha, it is by no means certain, or indeed probable, that the Pali canon of the sacred literature it has adopted does really form a

wholly reliable rescript of what Gautama actually taught, any more than present-day Hinayana is identical with that of the Pali canon. It may be that there was a more positive element inherent in his teaching from the beginning and that under the influence of Mahayana it has been given its true significance, very much along the lines indicated by Newman in his famous "Essay on Development" in Christian doctrine. In any case, the negations of Hinayana could never have become a popular religion, and if Buddhism was to be a great missionary force in the world, as the Mahayanists aspired to make it, it must become more specifically religious and catholic and less ascetic and negative.

Even before his death, some of the disciples of Gautama may have been inclined to regard him as more than human, and to endow him with divine knowledge in the sense of being omniscient. Therefore, the beatified teacher, who in fact was a practical, reasonable and unsentimental thinker, and has had few rivals in the history of religion, in all probability before his death was well on the way to becoming a divine founder of a redemptive faith. A legend grew up around him very early. His birthplace and the Bodhi-tree under which he received his illumination, were centres of pilgrimage, shrines were erected over the innumerable relics which were collected and venerated everywhere, some of which, including his begging-bowl, a left canine tooth, and a collar-bone, were taken to Ceylon from India where they aroused great devotional zeal even among Hinayanists. In later Pali texts he was described as *devatideva* (divinity above divinity), and the peerless, incomparable architect of the Dharma-city, or Paradise, in which the pure in heart were destined to live in the hereafter. From being the Elder Brother of the human race, he became the pre-existent, sinless, compassionate Saviour supernaturally conceived and miraculously born. It was but a step from this to the Mahayana faith.

Although it rapidly declined in India, Mahayana spread as a missionary faith in China, Tibet and Japan. There it proved itself able to adapt itself very readily to its new environment, and to incorporate into its comprehensive

system the indigenous gods as manifest Buddhas in a manner now to be considered in greater detail.

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## CHAPTER IV

### RELIGION IN CHINA AND JAPAN

BUDDHISM is said to have reached China in the first century B.C. early in the Han Dynasty, but although there is nothing improbable in this tradition, the historical evidence dates only from the beginning of the Christian era, when, according to legend, the Emperor Ming-ti in A.D. 65 was led by a dream to send to India for Buddhist teachers, books and statues. Behind this story there may lie the memory of very early infiltrations of the faith, but in any case very little progress was made until the old order broke up at the end of the Han Dynasty in A.D. 220. Then, in the turmoil and confusion of a disintegrated feudal society, the time was ripe for a new spiritual consolidating force to appear. The alternative lay between a quietistic mysticism of an indigenous Taoism (which will be considered later), and the more practical way of salvation offered by the missionaries of Mahayana Buddhism.

The monastic life fundamental in Hinayana was quite alien to the Chinese temperament and contrary to the stress laid upon home and family life in China. Therefore, it was only Mahayana that could hope to make any appeal to the masses, though it is true that monks like Gobharana and Matanga had prepared the way by establishing communities of holy men living ascetic lives under the patronage of sympathetic emperors. They showed, however, that the alien faith was able to adapt itself to its Chinese environment, and the Taoists soon discovered that they had much in common with the intruders. As the two systems coalesced, a new type of Buddhism emerged which, by the sixth century A.D., had become virtually a native and independent development, distinguished in north-western China as the Pure Land, or Amida school.



## Buddhist Sects in China and Japan

If Buddhism was to take root in China it could be only by a radical change in its original teaching and outlook. Already, as we have seen, the Mahayana had gone a long way in the transformation of the doctrine of the extinction of all desires of life into a positive faith in an eternal Buddha with Paradise as its ultimate aim. In China the *Ching-Tu* (Pure Land) movement was founded in the fourth century A.D. by a Taoist, Hui Yuan, who worshipped Amida (Sanskrit *Amitabha*) as the infinite eternal Buddha who had subjected himself to all the ills of life in this world in order to become the saviour of mankind. This interpretation of Buddhism received a ready response, and while monasticism was foreign to the Chinese temperament, in a turbulent age the cloister was a refuge. Monasteries, therefore, began to increase in numbers until they became vast establishments with ample funds at their command. Everywhere in the Tang era (A.D. 618-907) mendicants flourished and soon became a menace, contributing nothing to the common weal. Attempts were made to suppress them from time to time, but the vitality of Amidism was impervious to these efforts. Sects multiplied from the fifth century and onwards, deriving their distinctive features from the spiritual zeal of the Chinese monks.

From China the Sectarian movement spread to Japan where it came to its fullest expression and maturity. Though it may have been known in court circles in the fourth century, the official date for the introduction of Buddhism into Korea is A.D. 552. In 625 two sects were founded, the one called Sanron, or the "Three Books", the other Jo-Jitsu, this being the name of its sacred text, *The Book of the Perfection of Truth*. Both of these have become extinct, as have three other sects, Kusha, Hosso, and Kegon, which reached Japan in the seventh and eighth centuries, all being too literary, restricted and either scholastic or mystical to make more than a very limited appeal. More permanent and important was the Tendai sect in 804 with *The Lotus of the True Law* as its chief text. It was a product of the rationalist movement which

sought the gradual attainment of true knowledge through the study of the scriptures coupled with ascetic discipline and the practice of such ritual techniques as *yoga* as aids to meditation (*dhyana*). It endeavoured to reconcile the Mahayana and Hinayana, and, indeed, all the Buddhist schools and systems in the one all-embracing Buddha, interpreted as the Absolute. Its tolerance and breadth, however, led to a good deal of confusion in thought and practice, though as a spiritual synthesis it acted as a leavening influence.

Among the uneducated the Mystery, or True Word sect, called Chen-Yen in China and Shingon in Japan, became popular, as it comprehended in Japan the gods of the national religion, Shinto, as emanations of the spirit of Buddha (*Mahavairocana*), and practised mystic ritual acts, incantations and divination borrowed from the Tantric schools of northern India. It enabled the common man to be a Shintoist and Buddhist at the same time without qualms of conscience, and professed to be able to cure disease, control the weather, bring good luck and prosperity, and rescue the dead from hell.

This, however, did not satisfy a monk who took the name of Nichiren. After studying the Shingon and Tendai doctrines, in 1253 he came to the conclusion that only in *The Lotus of the True Law* was the orthodox teaching of original Buddhism to be found. Thereupon he started a vigorous campaign of abuse against all the sects, in the firm conviction that he was himself the incarnation of the Bodhisattva, or saving Buddha, whose appearance had been foretold in the *Lotus* sutra, raised up to restore the true faith and so to rescue the country from the civil strife that was then raging. His prophetic zeal and violent denunciations gained a following, and the subsequent threat of a Mongol invasion was interpreted as a vindication of his prophecies, notwithstanding the strenuous opposition he aroused. The sect has survived mainly as a political movement centred in Japanese nationalism rather than in traditional Buddhism.

The most important Mahayana sect is that called Jodo, or Pure Land, founded in 1175 by a scholar, Genku,

better known as Honen. He was converted to the faith in the saving grace of Amida when he read in a Chinese Amidist text, "only repeat the name of Amitabha with all your heart, whether walking or standing, whether sitting or lying: never cease the practice for a moment. This is the very work which unfailingly issues in salvation". It is not, however, just a mechanical or magical repetition of the sacred formula, *Namu-Amida-Butsu* ("Hail Amida Buddha") because the devout exercise must be performed "with a sincere heart" and most complete faith in the goodness and grace of Amida, who has willed that all men shall be saved, i.e., ascend towards the Pure Land and attain Buddhahood. But under the influence of Honen's disciple, Shinran Shonin, salvation by faith was carried to such extreme lengths that all incentive to human effort was lost. All that was required to gain access to Paradise was to repeat the formula and believe in Amida's inexhaustible store of merit and infinite mercy irrespective of moral conduct, as has been the fate of so many similar salvation cults.

Acquiring a passport to the land of pure light on such easy terms naturally was highly attractive, so that Jodo rapidly became the dominant influence in Japanese Buddhism. It was so very far removed from the teaching and goal of Gautama, however, that those who sought enlightenment by contemplation (*dyana*) in the orthodox manner turned to the Zen sect, known in China as Ch'an, where its three groups—Rinzai, Soto and Obaku—had become established in the twelfth, thirteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, the Rinzai branch entering Japan in 1191. Unlike Amidism, its purpose was to enable its adherents to experience illumination and the peace beyond understanding as an intuitive process, or immediate insight, such as Gautama achieved under the Bodhi-tree. Stern self-discipline was encouraged as a means towards the realization of the inward vision. At first neither the monastic life nor any cultus was adopted, but gradually a religious technique was established to facilitate immediate spiritual perception and intuitive awareness beyond the intellect and the senses—"the leap from thinking to knowing, from second-hand to direct experience".

## The Beginnings of Religion in China

Although Buddhism was a very powerful influence in China and Japan, it remained, as it began, a foreign missionary religion. Behind it lay the long and obscure history of Chinese culture going back to Palaeolithic times. In the communities that had settled in the basin of the Yellow River on the fertile loess land in the third millennium B.C. a vegetation cultus which may have been centred in a divine kingship, as in the Fertile Crescent, was predominant, though stress also seems to have been laid on ancestor worship. In many of the myths there are stories of ancient heroes who laid the foundations of the civilization and its dynasties, suggesting that the emperors occupied a very important and vital position in the beginnings of Chinese history. Thus, a legendary hero, Yu Ch'ao, is said to have taught men how to build houses, and an emperor, Fu Hsi, was alleged to have been responsible for the invention of writing, domestication of animals, the use of iron, playing upon instruments and fishing with nets. The divine farmer, Shan Nung, was regarded as the father of agriculture, and the Great Yellow Emperor, Huang-Ti, is accredited with inventing brick-making, the calendar, the use of money and fashioning vessels in clay and wood, while his wife introduced the silkworm and its culture.

All this is supposed to have happened in the very distant past. Indeed, Pan-Ku, the first man, is thought to have lived anything from two million to ninety-six million years ago, according to the various accounts of his adventures and attempts to make the world habitable. On this chronology Peking Man, known to archaeologists as *Sinanthropus*, living as he did in early Pleistocene times, was a comparatively recent arrival! Coming nearer to the historic period, three emperors—Yao, Shun and Yu—are alleged to have followed Fu Hsi, Shen Nung and Huang-Ti, in the third millennium B.C., and of these it was Yu who is said to have founded the Hsia in 2205 B.C., the first of the three dynasties. As no contemporary records exist of this traditional dynasty, how much is legend and how much history cannot be determined. Nevertheless, although the

chronology is not trustworthy, the first historic epoch in Chinese civilization is that of the Shang period, traditionally dated 1760-1122 B.C., and in the revised texts of the Bamboo Books at 1523-1027 B.C. The founder, called Tang, is represented as a vassal of the last Hsia king who overthrew the corrupt dynasty with the approval of Heaven, just as in due course the same divine mandate replaced Shang supremacy by that of the Chou Dynasty (c. 1122-221 B.C.), when the general pattern of Chinese culture was permanently established.

In this formative era, marking the transition from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age in North China, when the foundations of the indigenous religion were laid, magic and divination were conspicuous. In the determination of the weather, and obtaining the counsel of the gods and ancestral spirits on all matters of urgent concern, "oracle bones" played an important part. The technique consisted in heating bones or tortoise-shells, inscribed with a specific question, and deciphering with the aid of diviners the resultant patterns of the cracks. The pictograms produced in this process, in fact, became stylized and constituted the prototype of the characters in the Chinese script. Therefore, the oracle bones represent the earliest examples of Chinese writing, more than two thousand different characters appearing on those that have come to light. From the inscriptions a good deal of knowledge has been obtained about the deities worshipped at this early period, and already the spirits of the ancestors were gaining considerable prominence, together with those of the earth, the rivers and the natural forces.

### **Yang, Yin and T'ien**

Being primarily agriculturists, the attention of the earliest inhabitants of North China was concentrated mainly on the processes of Nature, on which their food supply depended. The earth was regarded as the author and giver of life, alike in the fecundity of the soil and of women as the mothers of the human race. The sequence of the seasons and of day and night, the harmony of the movements of the celestial bodies, in spite of occasional demon-

controlled eclipses, meteors and thunderbolts, suggested a rhythm in Nature interpreted in terms of a twofold principle called *Yang* and *Yin*, which became so important in later Chinese philosophy (i.e. in the second century B.C.). Perhaps as early as the beginning of the first millennium B.C. every natural object was thought to be under the control of a positive and a negative force interacting one against the other; the *yang* being active, warm, bright, procreative (i.e. male), the *yin* being passive, still, cold, dark, fertile (i.e. female), typified by the sky and the earth respectively, which together control the universe. *T'ien*, Heaven, the dome of the sky, was essentially *yang*, personified as *Shang-ti*, the supreme ancestor. The earth was *yin*, the source of life.

*T'ien* may have been originally the High God of the Chou people and *Shang-ti* that of the Shangs. When they merged as a composite civilization the two Supreme Beings assumed a more or less impersonal guise under the name of "Heaven". The Chou kings became *T'ien Tzu*, the "Son of Heaven", whereas *Shang-ti* as the supreme ancestor was worshipped only by the rulers of the Shang dynasty. But behind him, as the supreme power and authority, the source of all existence, was *T'ien*, "Heaven", which took the place of "God" in the more personal sense in which today most theists understand the term Deity. It was the will of Heaven (*T'ien*) that was decreed when the oracle bones were deciphered, or any other method of divination was employed to determine the right course to be adopted in connexion with unpredictable events.

### The Conception of Tao

Closely associated with this impersonal conception of Heaven was that of *Tao*, a word meaning literally a "road" or "way". The sun, moon and stars were believed to revolve round the earth. It was this revolution that was called the Tao and it was thought to produce the seasons, the hours of the day, the succession of day and night, and all the forces active in the universe as an inner necessity. It manifested itself through the interaction of the two principles, the *yin* and the *yang*, and, according to a more

refined and abstract conception, the Tao was the reason and the intelligence behind the revolution and its manifestations in the visible heavens. As Soothill says, "considered in the absolute it might almost be called Nature with a capital, in the relative nature." At the winter solstice the *yang* was born and increased until the summer solstice. During this first half of the year its activity was revealed in the new life of spring which reached its height at mid-summer when the *yin* was born, bringing with it decay and death, all the demons, spectres and noxious vapours associated with cold and darkness.

### The Imperial Sacrifice of Heaven and Earth

After the unification of China under a single emperor it became his duty as the Son of Heaven to sacrifice on behalf of the nation at these two critical seasons—the winter and the summer solstices. For this purpose a magnificent marble altar dedicated to Heaven was erected during the Ming period (A.D. 1368–1644) in a large park in the southern suburb of Peking, in an enclosure occupying an area of over a square mile and surrounded by a wall curved at the north end (Fig. 14). It consisted of three concentric terraces approached by nine steps. The lowest terrace was 210 feet in diameter, the second 150 feet and the third, on the top, 90 feet. The circular court, now shaded by cypress trees, measured 335 feet, with openings at each of the four cardinal points of the compass and surrounded by a square court 549 feet on each side. At the winter solstice, until the fall of the empire in 1911, the emperor and his officials repaired to the sacred enclosure—decorated in blue—to sacrifice to Imperial Heaven on behalf of the people, in accordance with the prescribed procedure handed down from antiquity.

After a period of fasting, observed by all who officiated at the rites, and two days before the actual sacrifice, a prayer was inscribed by the imperial secretaries on the "ancestral tablet" of Heaven. The ancestral tablets, which occupy a very prominent place in Chinese religious practice, may have been originally miniature headstones of the tombs of ancestors used when sacrifices were offered in the an-



FIG. 14.—The Altar of Heaven in Peking.



cestral hall instead of at the grave. If this were their origin, they would naturally function in the great State worship of Heaven and Earth when the Spirit of Heaven was invoked to take up its abode in the large tablet bearing the inscription, "Imperial Heaven, Supreme Ruler".

In view of its sacredness this tablet was kept in a purified room before the imperial name was affixed to it, and after it had been inscribed it was given to the one whose duty it was to read the invocation. On the evening before the sacrifice the animals to be offered were killed, the Altar of Heaven was swept, and the places for the various tablets of the imperial ancestors were prepared on the highest terrace, together with those of the sun, moon, stars, planets and of the wind, rain, the clouds and thunder, situated on the terrace below. The following day the imperial cavalcade made its way to the altar, and the emperor passed the night in the Palace of Abstinence to prepare himself for his solemn function. The tablet of Heaven was installed on the top terrace, and the emperor took his station at the south end of the second stage, while below were the princes, the musicians, and the minor officials in descending order.

The rite began with the emperor washing his hands. The victim was placed on the pyre, and the emperor ascended to the top terrace to kneel before the tablet of Heaven as he censured it. He then made an offering of a piece of blue jade and twelve rolls of silk, together with a quantity of meats and portions of the victims that had been sacrificed, and finally a cup of rice wine. The proclamation by the Son of Heaven was read announcing by decree of *Shang-ti* the continued harmony between Earth and Heaven and the merits of the ancestors. The offerings were then taken to the furnace to be destroyed in the flames, and the emperor and his retinue withdrew, having duly performed the annual worship of Heaven at the winter solstice to ensure the well-being of the nation in the new year.

Six months later, at midsummer, when the *yin* principle was born and the *yang* began to wane, an almost identical rite was held at the Altar of Earth in the northern suburb, but on a smaller scale. The altar consisted of only two

terraces, faced with yellow glazed brick and having yellow walls. On the higher stage the tablet of Earth was venerated by the emperor and the fertile earth besought to produce "the balmy wind and sweet rain", with the assistance of Heaven, that vegetation and the grains might abound. On the terrace below were the tablets of the five guardian mountains, the four great rivers, the four seas, and the mountains of the emperor's own country. The liturgical colour for this rite was yellow rather than blue, being the colour of the yellow earth in the ancient loess lands, and, like gold in Egypt, of the rays of the sun, emblematic of life-giving power. Departed ancestors also have been associated with Mother Earth in China, but, although it was regarded as in accordance with Tao to sacrifice to Earth at the summer solstice, in the Han dynasty the rites were held in the third month, when Nature was thought to be born. There has also been considerable variation in the ritual from dynasty to dynasty, but the fertility motive has remained the same.

### Ancestor Worship

Throughout its very long uninterrupted history the State religion in China retained its essential features as a combination of Nature worship and ancestor worship centred in the person of the emperor as the Son of Heaven. Behind it lay the fundamental conception of Tao as the law of the universe and of right human conduct (*ti*), correct behaviour towards the whole course of Nature and the life of society being the first duty of man. Family solidarity, however, has been so firmly established that all its members have been bound together in a vital relationship of interdependence, the living being dependent upon the dead for their prosperity and the dead upon the living for their well-being and sustenance. The memory of the ancestors has been kept alive by the prayers of the surviving members of the family, while the sacrifices offered to them provide them with strength and nourishment.

Since the living and the dead form one inter-related community, the one dependent upon the other, ancestor worship has been a powerful influence in giving stability to

the social structure and its religious organization. Society became organized on a feudal basis when the Shang supremacy was replaced by the Chou Dynasty, probably about 1122 B.C., claiming as it did descent from the Hsia. The Son of Heaven stood at the peak, the priestly functions of the emperor passing to the kings of Chou. Each of the several hundred small vassal states was ruled by a prince as the liege of the emperor, holding office by hereditary succession. Under him were vassal lords (dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts and barons), governors and their officials, in a carefully devised segmentation, with specially allotted duties which included religious functions. *Shang-ti*, the heavenly monarch, could be worshipped only by the emperor, and the major cosmic or earth spirits by the princes. It remained for the common people in a state of serfdom to worship their own ancestors and the spirits of the household, such as those of the door and the hearth, and the gods of luck and health.

Ancestor worship, however, was practised by every grade of society in some form. It was an essential part of the duties of the heads of clans, for instance, to consult the ancestors before engaging in any important undertakings. Sacrifices were offered to them on the anniversaries of their birth or death, very much as saints are commemorated on their holy days in our own calendar. In early times, at the death of a vassal liege, human attendants were required to accompany him in the grave until eventually animal victims were provided in their stead. After the Chou Dynasty paper-substitutes were burnt as ancestral offerings during the mortuary rites, and at pilgrimages to the graves of the ancestors in the autumn to protect them from the cold in the forthcoming winter.

### Confucianism

It is against this background that the Great Tradition in China associated with the name of K'ung Chung-ni, known as K'ung Fu-tzu (the Master), latinized by the Jesuit missionaries as Confucius, has to be placed. "The Sage and First Teacher" in China, as he was described on his tomb, was born in 551 B.C. in humble circumstances in

the feudal state of Lu in the Shantung province. In spite of the poverty in which he was brought up, his father having died shortly after his birth, Confucius acquired gentlemanly and scholarly interests and ambitions. When he married at the age of eighteen he held a minor official appointment but later he became a teacher of history, philosophy, ethics, music, poetry and propriety, and gathered round him a band of devoted disciples. The collection of the sayings attributed to him, known as the *Analects*, represent him as having inculcated the principles of right living, good government and a profound respect for the established order of society. This compilation may have been largely the work of a second generation of his followers—that is to say, the pupils of his original disciples—though we do not know precisely when it was put together, or how far the teaching of the Sage was amplified and re-interpreted by those responsible for the text.

Among the rest of the Confucian Books, *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Chung Yung*) is traditionally attributed to his grandson Tze-sze, but in all probability it was chiefly the work of an unknown writer of the second half of the third century B.C. In it are set forth the harmonious development of human nature through right action and the practice of reciprocity, i.e. what you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others. The *Great Learning* (*Ta Hsüeh*) is supposed to have been written by Tseng-tzu, a learned disciple of Confucius, but while it may contain many of the sayings of the Sage, the literary style and the thought suggest a later date, perhaps about the middle of the fourth century B.C. The *Book of Mencius* (Meng Tzu Shui) is of interest, as it appears to contain the teaching of one of the most outstanding disciples of Confucius, i.e. Mencius, who lived about 373–289 B.C., and may be said to constitute the first attempt to give a systematic exposition of Confucian philosophy.

China, however, had a literature before Confucius, and it was to this that he is alleged to have devoted the last four years of his life when, in 485 B.C., at the age of sixty-seven, he returned to his old home in Lu. There he compiled commentaries on the ancient books of *Historical*

*Documents, of Odes, of Rites, of Changes* (or divination), and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. While the first four were anthologies of older material, the last is said to have been his own composition. In fact, whatever part Confucius or his followers played in the annotation of these ancient writings, they were already in existence before Confucianism in any form came into vogue. Confucius claimed to be only a "transmitter, and not a maker". Therefore, he was content to record and maintain the wisdom of the past as the sure guide of right conduct and of a stable society in the present, and the hope for the future.

### Filial Piety

Of all the traditional values, Filial Piety was the cardinal virtue described in the *Ching of Filial Piety* (which is supposed to record a conversation between Confucius and Tseng-tzu on the subject) as "the root of moral power in a man. His trunk and limbs, his hair and skin, are received from his father and mother, and the beginnings of filial piety consist in his not daring to injure them. To establish his moral character, to walk in the right way, and to extend his good name to later generations, thereby glorifying his father and mother, this is the final accomplishment of filial piety." By the due performance of the prescribed sacrificial ritual, filial sons gave expression to the gratitude and devotion they owed to their parents and at the same time fulfilled the sacred duty laid upon them by tradition. To gather in the same place where their fathers had gathered before them; to perform the same ceremonial which they performed; to pay respect to those whom they honoured; to love and serve those who were dear to them, this was the highest achievement of filial piety.

### The Golden Rule

The relationship between father and son has been, in fact, the chief relationship in China. On it the wider relationship between rulers and their subjects has been based. Therefore it has been the root principle of good government, regarded as an ordinance of Heaven, which, taken

in conjunction with the Golden Rule of Reciprocity (*shu*), was applied to the Five Relationships between the ruler and his ministers, officials and subjects, husband and wife, father and son, elder brothers and younger, friend and friend. In the Golden Age of the Three Dynasties the good kings lived and governed in accordance with *li*, a word used to describe "propriety", "courtesy", "reverence" and correct personal public, social and ritual conduct in administration, harmonious living and the performance of the traditional rites and ceremonies in righteousness, benevolence and sincerity. Being essentially an optimistic humanist, Confucius had confidence in the goodness of human nature, and in the force of moral example in superiors. The masses, he said, "yield to the will of those above them". It was on this conviction that he used to base his ethic of the superior man, deducing his "Golden Rule" in its negative form from his study of man's mental constitution and the necessity of benevolence and righteousness in rulers.

Religion, in the sense of a personal relationship between man and the sacred order, was ignored, except in so far as Confucius took for granted the traditional framework of beliefs about the supernatural current in his day. He accepted an impersonal relationship between Heaven and earth, the obligation of offering sacrifices and of fulfilling the other prescribed ceremonial duties as an integral part of the established order, notwithstanding his advice to "keep aloof" from the spirits, a statement which may have meant no more than avoiding undue familiarity with them. He certainly laid no claim to having himself received any kind of divine revelation, unlike so many religious Founders and Prophets. It was not, in fact, until the movement he initiated came under the influence of Mahayana Buddhism that a temple cultus was developed with objective worship on specified occasions. The Sage was then venerated and finally raised to divine rank. Images and tablets in his honour were constructed, and altars erected with candles and an incense-burner, before which offerings were made and prayers addressed to the spirit of Confucius.

## Taoism

More or less contemporary with Early Confucianism, a quietistic movement flourished in China where it was traditionally associated with the name of Lao-tzu in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.—A.D. 221). So little is known about this legendary mystic that his existence as a historical character has been doubted. In any case, it is quite certain that the treatise called the *Tao Te Ching*, "The Book of the Tao and its Virtue", attributed to him, belonged to a later period, when the feudal order of the warring states had broken up and belief in an unchanging unity (*Tao*) underlying the diversity of the unstable material world, was taking shape in the minds of mystical thinkers. By the power (*Te*) of this hidden mystery in the universe—the Eternal Way (*tao*)—the orderly sequence of events was maintained, and, when unhindered by human activity, harmony and perfection prevailed. This was the message of the *Tao Te Ching*, and its purpose was to secure the perfect peace of union with Tao, "doing everything without apparently doing anything". Heaven and earth endure because they are the embodiment of a changeless Reality which never strives and is creative without effort or purpose.

"Tao is ever inactive, yet there is nothing that it does not do". So the first principle of the Taoist way of life was never to resist the fundamental laws of the universe and to cultivate the technique of quietude by yogic breathing exercises, "sitting with blank mind", and visionary experiences. This attitude to life was designed to produce unassertive effortless behaviour, described as *wu wei*, a phrase usually translated as "inactivity" in human affairs, but having as its aim doing nothing to achieve everything. For the Sage the highest life was that of contemplation and of becoming so impregnated with the "power" or "virtue" of Tao as to be one with it as the ultimate impersonal reality, and patterning life after its silent ceaseless working.

## Taoism and Alchemy

Taoism, therefore, began as a quietistic philosophy of inaction resembling in some respects the ideals of early

Buddhism in the quest of Nirvana. Although Confucius was said to have dismissed the traditional founder of Taoism as a baffling dreamer, in fact Taoism and Confucianism had this in common that both maintained the theory and practice of Tao, while Buddhism found no difficulty in adapting it to its own way of life and thought. In practice, however, although Tao was often an object of religious veneration with which the devout endeavoured to be in complete accord, as a religion Taoism rapidly degenerated into a magical system of alchemy and wizardry.

With the rise of the Han Dynasty in 206 B.C. it received imperial support, because its doctrine of inaction was calculated to make for popular submission to the established régime. This encouraged the growth of superstitions, and in particular the search for ways and means of securing immortality by magical devices. Chuang Tzu had maintained that "he who attains Tao is everlasting". Therefore, it could be argued on the authority of one of its greatest exponents that this boon should be obtained at all costs. To this end certain potent medicines and foods came into use in which the power and virtue of the universe were alleged to reside. He had also described the exploits of a philosopher, Lieh-tzu, who could "ride upon the wind. Sailing happily in the cool breeze, he could go on for fifteen days before his return." Men emerged out of cliffs and hovered in the air amidst flames and smoke. A Chou king was carried by a magician to the sky to see his celestial palace, and the isles of the Immortals were described with their miraculous plants and fruits to prevent old age and death.

A celebrated alchemist, Chan Tao Ling, claimed at the age of sixty to have regained his youth by drinking "Blue Dragon and White Tiger", a compound he had discovered when he ascended to heaven on the back of a tiger in search of the elixir of immortality. His potions were also said "to kill demons, chase off hobgoblins, protect the kingdom and bring peace to the people". After his death in the first century A.D., the hereditary privileges of his descendants were eventually confirmed in A.D. 748 by the T'ang



emperor, Hsuan Tsung, who bestowed upon him and his successors the title "Celestial Teacher". Until they were recently evicted, this line of high-priests survived on the Dragon-Tiger Mountain in Kiangsi.

In some of the Taoist sects, spiritual power had been acquired by breathing exercises as well as by life-giving dietetics. In most of them the principal preoccupation has been the discovery of edible gold as the elixir of immortality obtained from cinnabar rather than mercury, because mercury was regarded as a *yin* substance and therefore associated with death. In a book by one Ko-Hung, in the fourth century A.D., a quantity of prescriptions are recorded for the preparation of life-bestowing pills, charms against lethal weapons, and to facilitate walking through fire, or on water, travelling through the air and becoming invisible.

### Taoism as a Religion

Thus, Taoism became an alchemy with a deeply laid element of the bizarre, with its elixirs of immortality, isles of the blest, geomantic practices and numerous other fantasies, far removed from its earlier mystical quietism. In A.D. 165 a temple was erected in honour of its traditional founder, Lao-tzu, where offerings were made to him, though it was not until the beginning of the Tang Dynasty in the seventh century that Taoism was given imperial recognition as a religion with a pantheon of natural and astral gods, genii, immortals and divine beings, some of whom had been borrowed from Buddhism. At the head stood *Shang-ti*, the ancient High God, who was now equated with *Yu Huang*, the Jade Emperor, with his throne on the Jade Mountain in the highest Heaven. Next in rank came *Tao Chun*, the Honourable Tao, the controller of the *yin* and *yang*, with the apotheosized Lao-tzu, assigned the title of "Emperor of Mysterious Origin", as the third deity whose function it was to expound the doctrine of Tao. Below these were five classes of supernatural beings—immortals connected with heaven and earth and the isles of the blest. Eight other immortals were created by popular imagination with their abodes either in the mountains or on the

isles of the blest, together with the god of the hearth, the two guardians of the door, the city-god, the rulers of the four quarters of the earth, and a number of lesser divinities connected with health, luck and pestilence, trades and occupations.

Over all these divine beings and influences the Taoist priests exercised some measure of control, like the shamans and medicine-men in former times, and they claimed to be able to endow people with Tao to render them immortal and capable of supernatural powers to an almost unlimited extent. That all this was a travesty of the mystical philosophy of the founders of the movement was of little concern either to the superstitious masses, who found in the magico-religious beliefs and practices emotional satisfaction and security, or to their rulers, who utilized them as a stabilizing force in the empire. With the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Sung era (A.D. 960-1279) Taoism lost much of its influence and official patronage. Together with Buddhism it was condemned by Chu Hsi (1130-1200 A.D.), the St. Thomas Aquinas of Confucianism, who, like his Christian counterpart in the Middle Ages, took his stand on reason illuminated by the sacred scriptures against the irrationality of Taoist superstitions and negations. Nevertheless, although Confucianism became the State cult involving the veneration and deification of the Sage, Taoist occultism, alchemy, geomancy, divination and exorcism persisted, together with some of its higher conceptions of the Tao which have found permanent expression in Chinese art and literature.

### Shinto

In Japan the indigenous religion in its more organized form became known as *Kami-no-michi*, meaning "The Way of the Gods", called by the Chinese "Shen-tao", from which the term "Shinto" is derived. Behind it lay a primitive background about which little is known prior to the beginning of the Christian era. The small group of aboriginal Ainu people now living on the northern island of Hokkaido are thought to be descendants of the Neolithic inhabitants who have been driven to their present habitat

by successive invasions from the Asiatic mainland by way of Korea. These invaders were of Mongolian stock, crossed perhaps with a proto-Malay strain from Indonesia in the south of the continent. Like the Ainu the new-comers appear to have practised a highly developed animistic nature worship and fertility cultus in which the divine kingship was a prominent element. The sun was the principal object of veneration, and the volcano Fujiyama, which derives its name from the Ainu word meaning "ancestress", was regarded as a goddess. Stars, clouds, seas and vegetation were deified, and almost every natural object of any significance was thought to be animated by a spiritual being of some kind, good or evil.

The immigrants were in a higher state of culture, with a knowledge of the use of iron. They had succeeded in domesticating the horse as well as other animals employed largely for agricultural purposes, and of making pottery with the aid of the potter's wheel. By the second century A.D. this higher mongoloid civilization was definitely established in the islands of Japan, and from two chronicles compiled in the eighth century—the *Kojiki*, or "Record of Ancient Matters", and the *Nihongi*, or "The Chronicles of Japan", we get a good idea of the conditions and traditions that obtained before Chinese influences were felt strongly.

### Shinto Mythology

Society was organized on a tribal basis in patriarchal groups with a common ancestry, each clan having a chieftain and worshipping a guardian deity. The religion consisted of a highly developed polytheism with an elaborate mythology describing the emergence of a number of gods from a primeval chaos which was like an ocean of mud veiled in darkness. Eventually two of them—the one called Izanagi, "the Male-who-Invites", and the other Izanami, "the Female-who-Invites"—succeeded in producing the Japanese islands through a process of generation. Having made the waters, the mountains, the fields, the mists, fire and so on, they begat a host of deities, the last of whom, the fire-prince, fatally burned his mother at his birth. In his rage Izanagi hacked the child to pieces and went to the

underworld in search of Izanami, only to be chased back to earth by her and her evil gods. According to one tradition it was while he was washing away the pollution he had contracted there that he produced the great Sun-goddess, Amaterasu, together with the Moon-god, Tsuki-yomi, and the Storm-god, Susa-no-wo. In another version these gods were begotten by the divine couple, not by the male alone.

The Sun-goddess was assigned dominion over the world, and under her beneficent rule light and life prevailed, disturbed only by the machinations of her arrogant and impetuous brother, Susa-no-wo. He damaged the rice-fields she had cultivated by constructing irrigation canals. He also flayed backwards a heavenly piebald horse and flung it from the roof of the hall where Amaterasu was weaving garments for the gods in preparation for the harvest festival. In despair she withdrew into a cave in heaven and fastened the door. Thereupon the world was deprived of light and order until she was induced to come out by the combined ceremonial efforts and hilarity of the gods. Light once more burst upon the earth and Susa-no-wo was expelled from heaven. Thus, the triumph of the Sun-goddess over the Storm-god secured her rule over the world, which henceforth she has exercised through her earthly descendant, the Mikado, who occupies his throne as her representative.

This myth, recorded in the *Kojiki*, seems to be in a very modified form the Japanese version of the year-god tradition in the Ancient Middle East in which the Sky Father and the Earth Mother, under the guise of Izanagi and Izanami, are the principal figures. The death of the goddess follows the general pattern in Mesopotamia of the descent of Ishtar to the nether regions at the burning-heat of summer, Izanami having met her death by being scorched at the birth of the fire-prince. But it would appear to be a composite story, the vegetation theme being interwoven with a solar myth, in which the Sun-goddess plays the role of the life-giving deity and ancestress of the divine kingship after a victorious struggle with her unruly brother, the Storm-god. Here there may be preserved in mythological form the memory of ancient contests between northern and southern groups of

immigrants when they settled in the islands, for the Japanese are a mixed people, with Korean, Mongolian and Malayan strains superimposed on the indigenous Ainu population.

The Kojiki myth represents the combination of a number of strands of this composite tradition brought together in Shinto in a theocratic government entrusted to the descendants of Amaterasu, with magic, divination, exorcism and the occult side of religion left under the care of Susa-no-wo and his offspring. The result of this dualism, symbolized in the pact made between the two divinities assigning to the one (i.e. the Sun-goddess) the "realm of the visible", and to the other (i.e. the Storm-god) the "domain of the invisible", was to make Shinto essentially the official cult in its political and social aspects, independent of the occult and mystic side of religion.

Nevertheless, it has given tremendous stability to the nation and its throne, the Japanese State having been represented as more ancient and more secure than that of any other people, with an unbroken Imperial line going back to the first parents of the race, Izanagi and Izanami, and their illustrious creation Amaterasu-Omitkami. Thus, the Japanese regard themselves as the children of the gods and their Mikado as the direct descendant of the Sun-goddess who instituted the State by divine decree and gave it superiority over all other countries. However naïve and crude may be the mythological background of the national history as it is still presented in the official text-books for primary schools, with Amaterasu-Omitkami accorded the chief place as the first ancestress of the Emperor, it has fostered an intense nationalism and continues to make a very profound popular appeal, surrounding a doctrine of political absolutism with powerful supernatural sanctions.

### Emperor Worship

In the ancient clan organization the ruler of the district of Yamato, which was under the special protection of the Sun-goddess, gradually obtained political hegemony over the other chieftains, and thus became Emperor of Japan. As the worship of Amaterasu became the most important cult in the country, the Mikado was required to perform

its rites to secure the prosperity of the land, like the pharaoh in Egypt. Once Shinto had its centre in the State and acquired a national character, the Emperor, by virtue of his descent from the Sun-goddess, became himself divine and claimed the absolute loyalty of his subjects as a first duty, greater even than that of filial piety in China.

### Ryobu Shinto

This, however, as we have seen, did not prevent Chinese Buddhism making rapid progress in Japan and modifying the Old Shinto by adopting its gods and transforming them into Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who had reappeared in the islands. Thus, Amaterasu became identified with the Buddha Vairocana. But, in spite of the overwhelming influence of Buddhism, the worship of the national gods never lost its hold on the people. It was Buddhism which had to adapt itself to Shinto, not Shinto to Buddhism. From this syncretism emerged a "Double Aspect", known as Ryobu ("Dual Shinto"), "The Two-sided Way of the Gods", with its images, incense and other adjuncts of Buddhist worship and organization. So completely was it dominated by Buddhism that all subsequent efforts to extract the Shinto elements from it have failed. From the beginning of the sixteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century nearly all the shrines in the country were affected by it, and although strenuous efforts were made after the great Shinto revival in the early seventies of the last century to eliminate its doctrine and practice, it has left a permanent mark on shrine architecture.

### State Shrines

Originally the Shinto sanctuary was a very simple structure consisting of a few stakes thrust into the earth and covered with a thatched roof on the model of the dwelling-house (Fig. 15). The shrine, in fact, was the place where the *kami* (gods) either lived permanently or took up their abode when they were summoned thither during the local rites. There being no congregational worship they were quite small, and those who visited them stood outside to make their supplications. With the development of the Imperial

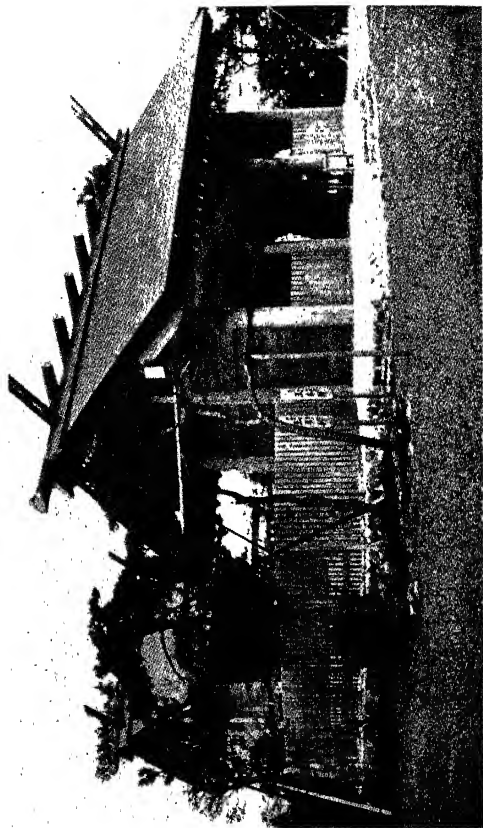


FIG. 15.—Shinto Shrine at Yokohama.

cultus the ceremonies of the Imperial household were held at a much more elaborate construction—the Grand Imperial Shrine of Ise, or the Great Meiji Shrine of Tokyo—in extensive buildings and grounds, and having a magnificent equipment secular and sacred. Thus, the shrine of Amaterasu at Ise was served by the daughter of the Emperor as high-priestess, and contained the sacred mirror, jewels and sword of the Sun-goddess.

In contemporary law the term *jinja* for a shrine is restricted to the holy places of original Shinto wherein the *kami* have their abode. Buddhist temples (*tera*) and those of the Shinto sects (*kyokai*) are not allowed to be described as *jinja*, thereby preserving a definite distinction between the traditional institutions of State Shinto, commonly called "Shrine Shinto", and those of "Sect Shinto" (or "religious Shinto") and of Buddhism.

### Shrine Shinto

Since Shrine Shinto has become the unifying centre for the stimulation of patriotism, loyalty and devotion to the throne, attendance at these shrines has become compulsory on ceremonial occasions for all Japanese, including Buddhists and Christians. To enforce this obligation they have had to be declared non-religious in character, State Shinto being officially a patriotic cult and not a religion. Nevertheless, the shrines are so inextricably connected with the indwelling *kami* in popular tradition and practice that what takes place at them can hardly have other than a religious significance, especially as they are the epitome of all that is sacred and divine in the nation. If in theory State Shinto was abolished after the Second World War and the divinity of the Mikado officially repudiated by the Emperor Hirohito, Sect Shinto has survived with more than twenty million adherents. How it will function in the future as the consolidating centre of the national faith of Japan is a crucial issue for the peace of the world.

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## CHAPTER V

### ZOROASTRIANISM AND JUDAISM

GREAT as was the work of the Buddha in India and Confucius in China, their influence on religious thought and practice in the West was not felt for a long time. The first to represent the wisdom of the East in Europe was a Persian prophet and priest, Zarathushtra, better known under the Greek form of his name, Zoroaster, who lived in the western part of the great plateau which stretches from the Indus valley to the valley of the Tigris in Mesopotamia; a region as we have seen that had been the cradleland of the Iranian civilization since the fourth millennium B.C. It was not until about the middle of the second millennium, however, that the Aryans first entered it and proceeded in two sections, one into north-west India, the other into western Asia, with a third group subsequently settling permanently in Iran, and giving their name of *Airya* (Iran) to the country. Now it was among them that the great reforming movement initiated by Zarathushtra was destined to arise, probably about 650-600 B.C., though a date as early as the tenth or ninth centuries has been suggested, contemporary with the Vedic period in India.

In India, where, as we have seen, an elaborate polytheism of nature gods was established among the Aryan-speaking peoples (Chap. III, p. 66), the good gods were called *devas* ("shining ones") and the demons *asuras* (lords). In Iran this was reversed. The *daevas* became evil spirits, as, for example, the beneficent Indra, who was transformed into an evil being, while the *asuras* (written as *Ahuras*) were the real Iranian deities, together with Mithra (the Vedic Mitra), the god of light and of war. *Haoma*, the counterpart of the life-giving Indian King-god Soma, and Ahura Mazda, who in all probability was identical with Varuna, the all-knowing and all-encompassing sky, who personified the moral order, very much as Asha was the right fash-

ioning of the universe as a cosmic principle like the Vedic *Rta*. The sacrificial fire, which in India, it will be remembered, was conceived under the name of Agni, in Iran became a principal object of worship closely associated with the intoxicating beverage *haoma*, sacrificially crushed and sacramentally drunk, as in Hinduism, to gain inspiration, health and power, though today it is consumed by the priest alone.

### Zarathushtra

Such were the divine beings and their cultus when Zarathushtra began his reform, convinced that he was the messenger of Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord and only God. He repudiated all the Vedic Iranian gods and their mythologies, the sacrificial offerings and the drinking of the sacred *haoma*, and subordinated to Ahura Mazda the *ahuras* and the *daevas* in the universal struggle between good and evil. Our information about his teaching, life and work comes chiefly from the collection of hymns known as the *Gathas*, contained in the first and oldest part of the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian scriptures, which were compiled, if not by Zarathushtra himself, at least probably by some of his contemporaries. From these metrical chants, written in an older dialect and different metre than the rest of the *Avesta*, it would seem that the seer's mission was to rally mankind to engage in a relentless conflict against the forces of evil, personified as *daevas*, and to abandon the worship of all the older deities in favour of that of the one and only Supreme Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda, known later as Ormuzd.

In many respects Ahura Mazda is akin to the Indian Varuna, the All-knowing One, with whom in origin probably he is identical. It was Zarathushtra, however, who represented him as the universal creator and sustainer of the good and the right, with subordinate divine beings created by him, or personified attributes of him, such as Vohu Manah or Good Thought, Asha Vahishta or righteousness (the best order), Khshathra Vairya or dominion, Haurvatat or prosperity, Aramaiti or right thinking and piety, and Ameretat or immortality, together with Spenta

Mainyu, the holy and beneficent Spirit who is in perpetual conflict with Angra Mainyu, the Lie or evil primeval Spirit, also called the Druj. These twin Spirits, the one good and the other evil, are not actually said to have been created by Ahura Mazda, though they meet in him. They existed before the world was called into being, but they have exercised their respective functions in relation to each other only since the earth became the battleground of the two opposed forces. "Never shall our minds harmonize, nor our doctrines", declared Spenta Mainyu at the first beginning of life, according to the Gathas, "neither our aspirations, nor yet our beliefs; neither our words, nor yet our deeds; neither our heart, nor yet our souls" (*Yasna*, 45, 22).

### Good and Evil

This interpretation of the age-long struggle between good and evil represents the first attempt in the history of religion to grapple with the problem in terms of ethical monotheism. Although the solution offered by Zarathushtra rapidly developed into a definite dualism, as it is stated in the Gathas, Ahura Mazda alone exists as the all-wise, good and beneficent Creator—the King of Righteousness. How the two primeval principles of good and evil came into existence is not explained, any more than it is in the Christian gospels. That they are in perpetual conflict cannot be denied. The universe, however, being the creation of the one and only good God, the physical and moral orders derive from his righteous will. Therefore, the dualism is not ultimate. The twin spirits were not thought to exist independently of Ahura, and in the end the good must prevail over evil. As the *daevas* were the offspring of Angra Mainyu and endeavoured to mislead man through evil thought, evil word and evil deed, so it is man's highest duty and mission to resist these lures and destroy the powers of evil by choosing aright, since in creating man Ahura Mazda gave him freedom of action as a moral being. Through Vohu Manah (Good Thought) and the power of the Good Spirit, Spenta Mainyu, he commends the right and gives divine assistance in its fulfilment, but

it is left to each individual to shape his own course. The situation is summed up in the Gathas in these words :

“The two primeval spirits who revealed themselves in vision as twins, are the Better and the Bad in thought and word and action. And between these two the wise ones chose aright, the foolish not so” (*Yasna*, 30).

By their right choice those who obey the law (*ashavan*) of Ahura help in the final victory of the Good Spirit of the Wise Lord over the Lie (*Druj*, or *Angra Mainyu*). They must always speak the truth, repudiate the nomadic life, till the soil, cultivate grain, grow fruits, treat kindly domestic animals and irrigate barren ground, for “he that is no husbandman has no part in the good message” (*Yasna*, 31, 10).

This identification of agriculture with the good life arose from the fact that the worshippers of Ahura Mazda were settled cattle-farmers keeping at bay the marauding nomads of the north, the Turanians, who were regarded as followers of the forces of evil intent on capturing cattle for their sacrifices to the *daevas*. It was against them that Zarathushtra fought in his holy wars, and it was as a result of his victory over them that the new faith was established on a firm foundation. He is, indeed, said to have lost his life when the Turanians stormed Balkh and destroyed the Zoroastrian temple Nush Azar in which he was officiating at the fire-altar. Whether or not this holy war was the occasion and manner of his death, the movement initiated by him survived him, but it soon lost its fundamental monotheism and strictly ethical character.

### Eschatology

Zarathushtra steadfastly maintained that in the end evil will be destroyed and good will prevail. Thus, in his doctrine of “the last things”, which constitutes the first systematized eschatology in the history of religion and which was destined to have a far-reaching influence on the apocalyptic speculations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, he taught that at the end of the world there would be a general resurrection. Then the forces of good and evil

would undergo a fiery test in molten metal, and although, in the Gathas, whether or not Angra Mainyu and all his followers would be destroyed by this ordeal is not very clearly stated, a golden age of order will be proclaimed as a result of the Judgment and the setting up of the kingdom of Ahura Mazda. In this renovated world, either on earth or in the spiritual order, only the good will have a place, and their final reward will be conditioned by the choices they have made in this life.

In addition to this "Great Consummation" when the present cycle of the world would be completed and a new cycle free from all evil would begin, an individual judgment immediately after death was also predicted. Every man being responsible for the deeds done in the flesh, he would be required to give an account of his actions at the last and his fate determined accordingly. By persevering in well-doing and following the good thoughts, the good deeds and the good words revealed by Zarathushtra, he acquired merit which was transferred to his heavenly account and would render him solvent at the Day of Judgment. If he could show a credit balance of merits, and thereby atone for his evil deeds, on the fourth day after death he would have a safe passage across the chinvat bridge which separates this world from the next life. Below it lies a molten lake into which those were destined to fall to their doom whose evil works predominated and so upset their balance on this perilous bridge as narrow as the edge of a razor. Righteous souls, on the other hand, who had followed the precepts of the prophet, easily went over and entered heaven, while, according to later eschatology, those whose good and evil deeds were more or less equal passed to an intermediate state (*Hainēstakāns*), or limbo, located between earth and the stars, till the final Judgment.

This doctrine of the last things is based on the principle that man works out his own salvation. Whatsoever is sown in this life is reaped hereafter, "evil for evil, good reward for the good, affliction to the wicked, happiness to the righteous. Woe to the wicked, salvation to him who upholds righteousness". No mediator or intercessor could determine the issue any more than prayers or sacrifices

could avail to alter the strict justice of the procedure. The fate of all human beings was decided by their own deeds once and for all in a clear-cut manner at the Judgment of Ahura Mazda by an ordeal by fire, and the crossing of the bridge called that of "the separator" (*chinvat*) because it divided those destined for the "House of the Lie" from those to be admitted to paradise, the "House of the Song", the best existence.

In the later Avesta the eschatology of the founder was elaborated as the primeval twin spirits came to be regarded as two opposed gods. Ahura Mazda, who was now called Ormuzd, was represented as having created the good, and Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman as he was designated, all that was evil, set over against each other in dualistic fashion. Unlike the devil of Jewish, Christian and Muslim tradition, Ahriman was represented as the actual creator of the *daevas* under his control, together with noxious creatures and serpents, wolves, ants, locusts and men of diabolical character, witchcraft, black magic and disease. This conception of a dual creation governed by two deities, each independent of the other, with their respective hostile armies of supernatural beings and equipment, made the devil (Ahriman) co-equal and co-eternal with God (Ahura Mazda). Indeed, in one of the later Avestan writings, the priestly *Vendidad*, Ahura is represented as explaining to Zarathushtra how Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) upset all his plans for making Persia a terrestrial paradise by introducing the bitter frost in winter, the excessive heat in summer, and all the ills which the Iranians had to endure, including, in addition to death, the 99,999 diseases he had maliciously created! Some of the Median priests, or Magi, tried without much success to mitigate this dualism by making both Ormuzd and Ahriman emanations of a primeval principle called Zervan, rather like the modern conception of space-time. But "emerging gods" are never very popular in monotheistic circles, and this theory was declared to be heretical, even though the victory of Ormuzd was vindicated at the last when the good was destined ultimately to be established.

In one of the later writings, the *Bundahish*, or "original

creation", belonging probably to the ninth century A.D., a theory of world-ages was set forth which in idea went back to the fifth century B.C. The whole of time, which was represented as having a duration of twelve thousand years, was divided into four periods each of three thousand years. In the first of these the *favashis*, or ancestral spirits who became the guardian genii of men and spirits, held sway. During the next three thousand years Primeval Man and a primeval ox arose, and it was in this age that, according to one version, the body of Zarathushtra was framed by archangels, though it was not until the beginning of the last of the aeons that he appeared as a historic person. In the third period the forces of evil became predominant and the progenitors of mankind were created, from whom the founders of the Iranian dynasty were descended. The fourth and last age, inaugurated by the founding of Zoroastrianism, has yet to reach its consummation. Zarathushtra was to be succeeded by three "saviours", each appearing at intervals of a thousand years, the last of whom, the Saoshyant or Messiah, supernaturally born of a pure virgin of the seed of Zarathushtra preserved for the purpose in a lake, would usher in the glorious new world order. The dead would then be raised and at the final Judgment the righteous would be separated from the wicked as a prelude to the pouring forth of molten metal on the earth and in hell. To the righteous it would be soothing like "warm milk", but to the wicked it would be agonizing torment burning away all the evil they had contracted. Ahriman and his demons would be cast into the flames to be consumed, or else they would be driven into outer darkness to be hidden away or destroyed at the last. A new heaven and a new earth would be created in which righteousness, joy and peace would prevail for ever, and Ahura Mazda become all in all.

### The Parsis

Although the influence which Zoroastrianism, and its later dualistic development called Mazdaeism, exercised on Judaism, Islam and indirectly on Christianity, was considerable, only a remnant of the great movement inaugurated by Zarathushtra survived in Iran after the



Muslim conquest in the seventh century A.D. In Persia the faithful few became known as the Gabars, or "infidels", because they refused to accept the claims of the Prophet Muhammad, and long persecution has reduced them to less than ten thousand today. But small though they are numerically, they have tenaciously practised their ancient faith throughout the ages in their fire-temples, purified of many of its later dualistic and magical accretions. The rest made their way into India in the seventh and eighth centuries where they became known as Parsis (i.e. "people of Pass", or ancient Persia). There they settled under less strenuous conditions, mainly in Bombay, and soon became a prosperous and wealthy community, numbering today about 50,000, with about the same number scattered throughout India, together with a few isolated groups in London and other commercial centres all over the world, for Parsis have been essentially business men and industrialists.

Wherever they have settled they have been well conducted, successful and highly competent, generous in their benefactions and respected by their fellow-citizens. In short, they have occupied a position in society not unlike that of the Society of Friends in the West, having much the same dignity, reserve and aloofness, content and, indeed, determined to practise their faith in their own way without let or hindrance. At the age of seven, or rather later, their children are invested with the sacred cord and shirt symbolizing their initiation (*naojate*) into the community as "a Zoroastrian worshipper of God", pledged to "praise good thoughts, good words and good actions"; to uphold "the Zoroastrian religion which is holy, and which of all the religions that have yet flourished, or are likely to flourish in the future, is the greatest, the best and the most excellent, and which is the religion given by God to Zarahushtra". This confession of faith has to be repeated daily by Parsis, and in working out their own salvation by thinking, speaking and doing nothing but the truth, they are required to practise the fire-rites in their temples by which they approach sacramentally the presence of Ahura Mazda.

It is the duty of the priests, duly ordained for the purpose by a two-fold consecration, to compound, purify and

tend the sacred fire, feeding it with sandalwood, while saying the prescribed prayers, with covered mouths like surgeons and nurses in an operating theatre, lest their breath should defile it. On New Year's Day, which is the most important festival of the year for them, they bathe, put on new clothes, and repair to the temple of fire to burn sandalwood, distribute alms to the poor and exchange greetings. Preceding these festivities a more sombre feast of the dead is held in honour of Farvardin, the divine being who presides over the spirits of the ancestors (*fravashis*). It is then that the *fravashis* are thought to revisit their descendants, and special acts of welcome are made on the hills before the Towers of Silence (*dakhmas*), where, inside a circular brick or stone structure, the corpses are deposited to be consumed by vultures.

### Towers of Silence

This grim mode of disposal of the dead has been adopted to prevent contamination of the soil or of water by dead bodies, the birds of prey reducing the mortal remains to a skeleton within an hour of deposition on the stone floor of the *dakhma*. The clothes with which the corpse is covered are thrown into a pit outside the Tower before exposure, or in Bombay they are destroyed with sulphuric acid. Prayers are recited by the mourners before the procession returns whence it came. The bones when dried by the sun are thrown into the central well to crumble to dust. In the large Towers outside Bombay a sacred fire is kept burning continually, and at the Annual Festival, which lasts for ten days, the funerary ceremonies are repeated but directed, as has been explained, to the spirits of the dead.

In small isolated Parsi communities, when the absence of vultures makes it impracticable to erect Towers of Silence, interment in lead coffins or stone chambers is adopted, preceded by the customary death-bed rites which include an act of penitence and confession of faith by the dying person, the washing of the corpse after death, the drawing of a furrow (*kasha*) in the ground round it to keep off evil spirits, the showing of the body to a spotted dog, the burning of fire and other prophylactic ceremonies.

performed by the priests wearing cotton masks over their mouths to avoid defilement, prior to the arrival of the bearers (*nasasalars*) clothed in white to carry it away to the place of disposal. While these pious offices are being performed by or on behalf of the mourners on earth, the soul is believed to be awaiting its perilous passage across the chinvat bridge on the fourth day, on which its eternal destiny depends.

In addition to fire, water is regarded as the element most worthy of adoration and never to be defiled. Behind this veneration lies the ancient nature-worship of the Aryan ancestors of the Zoroastrians before it was given a monotheistic interpretation by Zarathushtra and his followers, when it became a sacramental means of approach to Ahura Mazda. Thus, in Bombay, Parsis assemble at the beach, especially at sunset, to dip their fingers in the water of the ocean, apply it to their eyes and forehead, and lift up their hands in prayer to Ahura Mazda in the presence of the setting sun as a symbol of "the righteous, shining, undefiled spirit of the waters".

Combined with a ritualistic legalism characteristic of the *Vendidad* and its contemporary Avestan literature, there is a very strong ethical strain in modern Parsiism. Although this is derived from prophetic Zoroastrianism, in practice today it sometimes has become virtually either agnostic or theosophic in its outlook, the earlier monotheism having been more or less abandoned. Like Judaism, it has inherited a prophetic tradition rooted in ethical monotheism to which has been added the punctilious observance of a prescribed system of rites and ceremonies, which, since the misfortunes that have befallen the community since the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C., has been stressed as the distinguishing feature of a much-tried people.

### **Zoroastrianism and Judaism**

That Zoroastrianism deeply influenced post-exilic Judaism is not surprising, when it is remembered that it was after the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great in 538 B.C. that permission was given to the captive Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The returned

exiles, however, remained under Persian rule just as did the vast majority of the Jews who stayed on in Mesopotamia. It was about this time that Zoroastrianism was beginning to make its influence felt in the Iranian Empire, though it was not until some two hundred years later that it was very apparent in Judaism, after Alexander the Great had conquered Persia in 331 B.C., and subsequently established his rule over Palestine. Syria then became part of the western section of the Macedonian Empire governed by Ptolemy, who had been one of Alexander's generals. It was at this time that a new type of Jewish literature, known as apocalyptic, began to emerge showing unmistakable traces of the principal doctrines of Zoroastrianism concerning heaven and hell, judgment after death and at the end of the world, an angelic hierarchy, a dualism of good and evil under two opposed forces with their respective leaders, Michael and Satan, together with a Messianic kingdom in which righteousness would prevail. Alexander, it is true, showed scant regard for the Zoroastrian movement, which he associated with the Achaemenid dynasty he had defeated. Nevertheless, its eschatological doctrines had made sufficient impression on current thought in the Persian world (which, as has been explained, included Jewry) that by the second century B.C. it had become an established feature in the new Jewish apocalyptic writings, such as the book of Daniel in the canonical scriptures of the Old Testament, and the extra-canonical book of Enoch and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

### Post-exilic Judaism

Although the beginnings of Iranian influence on Judaism may go back into the third or even the fourth century B.C.—an interim period about which comparatively little is known from Jewish literary sources—the stirring events at the beginning of the second century unquestionably stimulated this eschatological type of speculation. So long as Judah remained under Persian domination, despite the violent opposition of the neighbouring Samaritans to the north of Jerusalem after the refusal of the orthodox exiles to accept their co-operation in the restoration of the temple and the

city, the priestly state was established and maintained under Ezra and Nehemiah and their successors. Foreign wives were put away, intermarriage with non-Jews was forbidden, sabbath observance was rigorously enforced, the temple worship was restored and re-interpreted by the newly established Priestly school in terms of the ethical monotheism of the prophetic movement, with the ritual observances referred back to a divine origin in the days of Moses in the desert. The Law, or Torah, consisting at first of the five books attributed to Moses, and subsequently extended to cover the Prophetic writings, the Psalms, and virtually the whole of the Old Testament, was made an infallible guide in faith and conduct, and synagogues were erected for the reading and exposition of this scripture and instruction in its precepts. The temple, in short, was the centre of worship; the synagogue was the local place of assembly for biblical reading and exegesis.

The religious life of the community was sustained by the sequence of fast and festival beginning with the observance of the Passover, with which was combined the agricultural Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Maṣṣoth*) in the spring (March or April). This was followed seven weeks later by the Feast of Weeks, or first-fruits, ending in Pentecost at the close of spring, marking the end of barley harvest and the beginning of wheat harvest, originally a midsummer festival. The last great event of the agricultural year was the Ingathering, heralded on New Year's Day (*Roshhash-shanah*) on the first day of the seventh month (*Tishri*) in the autumn when the trumpets were blown and Yahweh may have been proclaimed as king in a coronation ritual. Ten days later the Day of Atonement was observed as a communal expiation of the evil contracted by the nation during the year and carried away by a goat called *Azazel* to a demon of the waste in the wilderness, while the temple, the altar, the priesthood and the whole congregation of Israel were purified by sacrificial blood (cf. Lev. xvi. 1-28).

### **The Day of Atonement**

This very primitive ritual may go back to the pre-exilic period, centring as it does in the transference of evil to a

"scapegoat", and in cleansing by the sprinkling of blood on persons and things. It was, in fact, represented as having been instituted by Moses and Aaron in the desert under divine guidance, but it is actually mentioned in the Old Testament only once, and then in the post-exilic Priestly Code (Lev. xvi). It was apparently unknown to Ezekiel and Zechariah, who regulated the offerings and fasts in commemoration of national disasters without reference to it (Ezek. xlv. 18 ff.; Zech. viii. 19). Therefore, the institution of the Day of Atonement must be subsequent to the practice of cleansing the sanctuary on the first day of the first and of the seventh months—presumably after the time of Ezra (397 B.C.), since the fast held on the 24th of the seventh month, mentioned in Nehemiah ix. 1, 2, has no connexion with it. But once it was established it occupied a position of great importance in post-exilic and Rabbinic Judaism, where it acquired an ethical significance. Thus, the Jewish rabbis taught that while the more grievous offences committed with what they called "a high hand" had to be expiated through this ceremonial, to be efficacious the observance must be performed with sincerity of heart and true repentance. As a result of the Exile the ethical conception of repentance and forgiveness stressed by the Hebrew prophets had become recognized, but in accordance with the spirit of post-exilic Judaism it was associated with a very primitive ritual observance given divine sanction.

### The Feast of Tabernacles

Finally, the autumnal Festival concluded with the Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkôth, on the fifteenth day of Tishri, when for a week the Hebrews are said to have dwelt in booths made of "branches of palm trees and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook" (Lev. xxiii. 40). This was the most important event in the year as an expression of gratitude for the vintage and the autumnal fruits, continuing year by year the remembrance of the lovingkindness of Yahweh in the days of old when their forefathers wandered in the wilderness. Being a New Year rite held at "the turn of the year" (Ex. xxxiv. 22), origin-

ally it may have had a similar purpose and function to those of the Annual Festival in the agricultural civilizations in the Ancient Middle East, when the death and resurrection of the vegetation-god was celebrated. Certainly some of the psalms which were probably associated with it suggest the enthronement of Yahweh as King (*Melek*) to ensure an adequate rainfall during the ensuing year (Ps. lxxv. 9-13, cf. civ. 13 ff., xlvii, lxxviii, lxxiv. 16 f., xxiv.; cf. Zech. xiv. 16 f.) and proclaim his victory over the forces of death bringing "salvation" (i.e. Victory) to the people (Ps. xlviii, lxxviii. 13 ff., xciii-xcix). But as very few of these psalms can be dated before the Exile, they do not help us very much to understand the significance of the Festival in the days of the monarchy except as a survival of earlier beliefs and observances.

### The Sacred Literature of Judaism

The chief aim of those engaged in building up a consolidated social structure on a strictly nationalistic basis was to establish a priestly theocratic community with the high-priest at the apex claiming descent from the royal priest Zadok who also was supposed to have been descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses. Under him was the temple priesthood, and its servants the Levites, while, as the sacred literature developed and more and more attention was paid to the Torah, those concerned with the copying and interpretation of the writings—the scribes—rose to the position of an independent segment in the religious order. As some of them became teachers in the synagogues, and eventually rabbis, their task was to interpret the Hebrew scriptures in Aramaic, which was the spoken language of the period by the common people in Palestine and Syria. At length a translation into Aramaic called the *Targum* was made, just as a Greek translation, the *Septuagint*, had been begun in the third century B.C. and completed by the first century B.C.

As a result of all this literary activity the Hebrew Bible (i.e. the Old Testament) as we now have it was compiled by the priests and scribes, and made accessible to the community at large through the synagogues and their teachers,

the rabbis. The division of the Canon of Scripture was artificial and illogical. It consisted in (a) *the Law*, called the *Torah*, made up of the first five books of the Old Testament which were thought to have been written by Moses; (b) *The Prophets*, subdivided into the "former prophets" (viz. Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings) and the "latter prophets" (viz. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets); (c) *The Writings*, namely, the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

It was under the influence of the Hellenistic movement that predominated after the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C., bringing Greek thought and practice into Palestine as the name of the period suggests, that the idea of forming a Hebrew Canon of Scripture arose to distinguish these sacred writings from the apocalyptic literature which from about 200 B.C. began to circulate among the Jews as extra-canonical writings standing outside the Hebrew Canon. In the Septuagint, or Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, however, the books which now make up the Apocrypha (viz. Judith, Tobit, Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremiah, 1-4 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus), together with the Psalms of Solomon and the first (Greek) book of Enoch, were also included. They were called Apocryphal, from the Greek word *apokryphos* meaning "hidden", because they contained the hidden wisdom which should not be revealed to the uninitiated. It was not until the second century A.D. that they were regarded by Christian writers as pseudepigraphic, and eventually said to be read for "edification" rather than as "revelation".

For the Jews revelation was the making known of the will and purpose of God in concrete historical situations, and through divine intervention in the control of events. The Hebrew prophets claimed to be the mouthpiece of Yahweh, prefacing their utterances with the phrase "Thus saith the Lord", in the belief that they were delivering a message direct from the Deity. Stress was not laid, however, on the foretelling of future happenings or, indeed, on the making



known of religious and moral precepts. In the apocalyptic literature, on the other hand, the eschatological theme is predominant, centred in judgment and the "last things" (heaven, hell and the end of the world). Now there can be little doubt, as we have seen, that Persian influences are to be discerned in that section of these writings which belong to the period after the Maccabaeen revolt, which began in 167 B.C. when Judah Maccabaeus made a successful attempt to call a halt to the destruction of Jewish faith and culture by the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes.

### The Maccabaeen Period

Since Palestine had fallen under the Seleucid, or Asiatic (Syrian), section of the Macedonian Empire in 198 B.C., increasing pressure had been put on the Jews to adopt the Greek way of life and religion, until, when Antiochus came to the throne in 175, he tried to force them to worship the Greek gods, Zeus and Dionysos, forbade them to observe the Sabbath, circumcise their children or even to have copies of the Hebrew scriptures. In the temple at Jerusalem he erected an altar to Zeus and sacrificed on it pigs, which for them were the most unclean of all animals. When an aged priest Mattathias was ordered to perform this sacrilegious act at an altar in his village of Modein, he slew the commissioner and raised the standard of revolt which his sons, Judas, Jonathan and Simon, carried to such a successful conclusion that they regained Jewish independence in Palestine until internal strife and civil war eventually broke out among their successors. Then, to restore order, the Romans intervened, and in 63 B.C. brought the country under their jurisdiction as part of the province of Syria.

It was at the beginning of the Seleucid period, in 198, that the book of Daniel was written, describing "the abomination of desolation" perpetrated by Antiochus, who is called the "little horn" and represented as the supreme embodiment of the evil power. The Maccabaeen revolt and the subsequent course of events are recorded in the books of the Maccabees in the Apocrypha, but although in these stirring times thought was moving in an "apocalyptic" direction—as it often does in periods of crisis—it did

not conform very closely to the Zoroastrian pattern. The eschatology in the book of Daniel is quite distinct from that in the later prophetic writings, however, and in it appear the archangels Michael and Gabriel, together with Uriel and Raphael in the book of Enoch. In so far as this angelology resembles the Iranian prototype, it is that of the Gathas rather than of later Mazdaeism. Similarly, the Messianic hope that developed in Judaism after the Exile, and the dualistic tendency which found expression in a personal source of evil, are indications of a common pattern of ideas, each doubtless with its own traditional background and history, but converging more and more, until in the post-Maccabaeian period the Iranian eschatology prevailed.

Judgment and the Day of the Lord were deeply rooted beliefs in Hebrew religion, but the detailed delineation of the later eschatology, and the doctrines of resurrection, unquestionably were the result of Persian influence in the Greek and Maccabaeian periods. The conception of the Son of Man, together with the later Jewish doctrine of the "Last Things" found in the Similitudes of Enoch and in 2 Esdras xiii., in all probability came into Judaism from Persia, where, as has been explained, the Saoshyant became the central figure in the eschatological scene. The destruction of the world by fire falls into line with the Iranian apocalyptic speculation, though it was also held by the Stoics in the Roman Empire. Indeed, during the last two centuries of the pre-Christian era, so many influences were interacting on each other in the Graeco-Roman world and the Middle East that great caution is needed in any attempt to determine their several sources and contacts. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Jewish apocalyptic literature and its Christian derivatives.

### Jewish Parties and Sects

As a result of the Maccabaeian check to the Hellenization of Judaism and the Jewish State, the Torah became established as the supreme authority. The strictest upholders of the national traditions came to be known as the *Chasidim*, or "pious ones", distinguished by their zeal for the Law in

the strenuous days of persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, preferring "to die together in their innocency rather than profane the Sabbath" (1 Macc. ii. 29-38). From them it would seem the Pharisees grew as a Jewish party strictly orthodox in their loyalty to the Law and punctilious in the observance of oral tradition as an unwritten Torah, which the other important group, the Sadducees, rejected as having no validity. The dispute between them developed into a breach which continued until the Sadducees virtually came to an end with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In the meantime the contention had acquired a political character when John Hyrcanus, the successor in the high-priesthood of Simon Maccabaeus (134-104 B.C.), after having supported the Pharisees annulled their decrees and espoused the cause of the Sadducees.

The Pharisees embraced the new apocalyptic messianic ideas involving the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment in Iranian terms, and laid particular stress on ceremonial purity and on personal religion in the home and in everyday life. Although they are represented in the Christian Gospels in an unfavourable light and castigated in the Jewish Talmud, in fact they were held in high esteem in Palestine in the first century A.D. They engaged in active missionary enterprise, compassing land and sea to make proselytes (Mt. xxiii. 15), and the survival of Judaism as an ethical religion after the collapse of Jerusalem was due to the solid foundations laid largely under their influence. As a morally "separated" people they were in the nature of a puritan movement, exasperating in their scrupulosity and narrow in their exclusive piety and false introspection, as is this particular school of thought and practice in every religion in which it recurs, yet they unquestionably upheld righteousness by their tradition.

While the Pharisees were for the most part a group of zealous laymen who lived and functioned mainly in Jerusalem and the neighbouring towns, the Sadducees were predominantly a priestly aristocracy of landowners and gentry, naturally conservative in their outlook and sticklers for the just administration of the Law, but having no use for accretions like the "tradition of the Elders", an unwritten

Torah, foreign apocalyptic intrusions in the official faith, and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. They had little influence among the masses, who turned to the Pharisees, or, if they were politically minded, either to the Herodians, who supported the reigning house of Herod, or to the revolutionary zealots in the hills of northern Galilee who were determined to throw off the Roman yoke by force. A few cut themselves off entirely from the world and its affairs, and, as Essenes, withdrew from its corruption into seclusion in the desert east of the Jordan, or in villages, in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. They rigorously observed the Sabbath, adopted a communistic way of life, practised celibacy, fasted, prayed, engaged in ceremonial ablutions and refused to bear arms or to take life in any form. Finally, in the second half of the first century A.D., a small group became disciples of Jesus the Nazarene who had been crucified under the Roman procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, at the instance of the Sadducean high-priest, Caiaphas, with the connivance of the Pharisees and without opposition from the other religious and political groups. Of this movement, more will be said when the Christian religion comes under review in a later chapter.

### The Roman Period

From the coming of the Romans under Pompey in 63 B.C., and the incorporation of the Jewish kingdom in Palestine into the Roman province of Syria, to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Messianic expectation was at its height as the expression of the general unrest of the period. At first, although Roman domination was bitterly resented, Caesar himself was a revered figure owing to his favourable treatment of Jews elsewhere in the Empire. The appointment of an Idumaeen in the person of Antipater as the local ruler, and then of Herod the Great (37 B.C.-A.D. 4) after the death of Caesar, aroused the indignation and intense resentment of the Jews, which were not allayed when his sons Archelaus, Philip and Antipas, ruled over Judaea, followed by Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great. Although his son, of the same name, who succeeded him was given the title of king, the situation was

unchanged, and Judaea soon came again under the rule of procurators. Of these, Pontius Pilate has become an outstanding figure owing to his part in the crucifixion of Christ. His vacillating policy, which incidentally is revealed in the accounts of the trial of Jesus in the Gospel narratives, only aggravated the unrest, and ended ultimately in his own downfall. His successors were not more successful in curbing the widespread discontent, until the final crash came with the outbreak of war against Rome in A.D. 66, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem four years later.

### Rabbinic Judaism

This brought to an end the Temple worship with its sacrificial system and the priesthood, the Sadducean party, the Zealots, the Herodians and the Essenes. The Pharisees remained, as they formed neither a political party nor a religious sect. Their concern and *raison d'être* was a more exact interpretation of the unwritten Law with its manifold regulations and ordinances. The Scribes, being the doctors of the Law, for the most part were Pharisees, and therefore had kept themselves aloof from political entanglements. Many of them took refuge with the Romans at Ludd, Jamnia and Jabne. At Ludd a flourishing school of scribes was established under Tannaites ("Traditioners" or "Teachers") like Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Aqiba, while at the seaside town of Jamnia (Jabneh) a famous "house of Learning" was set up by a leading rabbi, Johanan ben Zakkai, who was a disciple of Hillel, the head of a celebrated Rabbinic school at Jerusalem from about 60 B.C. to A.D. 10.

In contrast to his conservative and rigorist contemporary Shammai, Hillel, who had gone to Jerusalem from Babylonia with a wider outlook, recognized that legislation must be adapted to varying conditions and human needs, and brought into relation with scripture. The controversy between the two schools and their opposed tendencies continued until after the fall of Jerusalem when the Hillelites gained the ascendancy, largely as a result of the powerful influence of Johanan ben Zakkai being cast on their side. As the leader of the more progressive Pharisees, who now

held the field, he endeavoured to safeguard those parts of the Law which could still be practised (e.g. Sabbath observance, circumcision and ritual domestic rules), and to adapt the prescriptions of Judaism to the changed conditions of the times, resulting above all from the cessation of the temple worship. The dogma of the resurrection of the dead was given the status of a truth revealed in the Torah, thereby making the Sadducees, who rejected it, heretics. A long-standing controversy between the schools of Shammai and Hillel as to whether or not the books of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs were scripture was decided in favour of the Hillel contention that both belonged to this category, as did Proverbs and Esther, but Ecclesiasticus and all subsequent sacred writings were pronounced to be non-canonical.

In place of the governing body known as the Sanhedrin, which became defunct after the fall of Jerusalem, a Tribunal was established with its president as the "Patriarch", given official recognition by the Romans as the supreme head of the dispersed Jewish community. Under its guidance the correlation and interpretation of the Scriptures and the Traditions were pursued by the school at Jamnia. Among the unwieldy mass of material available was the vast quantity of orally preserved and transmitted expositions of the Torah, dealing with religious and legal practice and the regulation of daily life, known as *Halakah*. This was set forth in the Rabbinic commentaries, or *Midrashim*, written in the scholastic Hebrew of the Tannaim in the form of legend, history and exegesis called *Haggadah* ("teaching"), and correlated with the system of jurisprudence (*Halakah*). Subsequently, other books were composed, in which Haggadistic material was combined with earlier elements of oral tradition and data taken from the Talmud.

### The Mishnah

In the widest sense of the term, *Mishnah* ("Repetition") covers all the Rabbinic teaching and learning, *Midrash*, *Halakah*, and *Haggadah*; that is to say, the exegesis of Scripture and the rules of the unwritten Law derived from

it, including the actual formulated rule and the religious and moral instruction and edification based thereon. Every school, in fact, had its own Mishnah until the Patriarch of Palestinian Jewry, Judah I (A.D. 164-217), arranged the heterogeneous material under six heads with some sixty tractates. This "Great Mishnah" soon acquired such authority, not only in Palestine but also in Babylonia, that it came to be regarded as the standard Mishnah of Judaism, second only in authority to the Torah, ordering in the minutest detail every phase of Jewish life and belief in accordance with the opinions of the famous doctors of the Law. Supplementing it was another work of the same class, the *Tosephta* ("Supplements"), in which the Tannaite doctors amplified the text of the Mishnah with additions and explanatory notes, often drawn from much earlier sources. Therefore, it had some measure of independence.

### The Talmud

Another amplification was known as the *Gemara* ("Completion" or "Discussion"), in which the Babylonian doctors brought together all unrecorded Aramaic *Halakah* and Hebrew *Haggadah*, combining the resulting product with the Mishnah to form the *Talmud*, so named from the Hebrew *lamad* "to learn" or "to teach". Work on the Palestinian Talmud began at Tiberias in the school of Johanan, who died in 279, though the final redaction was not made until the fourth century. Meanwhile, in Babylonia, Rabbi Ashi (352-427) followed by Rabbi Rabina (499) compiled a second Talmud in Aramaic with Hebrew quotations from ancient doctors to correct some of the errors in the Palestine version. As in its present form it is about four times as large as the Jerusalem (Palestine) Talmud, filling nearly three thousand (2,947 to be precise) folio leaves, its influence on Judaism throughout its checkered history has been immense, sustaining a persecuted people during their manifold trials and tribulations. Despite all the efforts to destroy it, it has remained a lamp to their feet and a light to their path in their darkest hours.

In the seventh century there was a widespread persecution of the Jews from Byzantium in the east to Spain in the

west, and as the Jews spread in Europe the hostility between them and the Christians increased. From Mesopotamia they migrated to northern Africa and the Iberian peninsula in the tenth and eleventh centuries in the wake of the Moors, bringing with them the non-Talmudic liberal learning of the Babylonian schools and of Arabic science. In Cordova this new type of Karaite Jewish scholarship flourished; it rejected tradition and the authority of the Talmud in favour of the Old Testament as the sole source of religious knowledge and practice. It was in Cordova that Moses Maimonides was born in 1135, but later he and his family were forced by Muslim persecution to flee to Cairo. There he endeavoured to introduce order into the mass of tradition, reducing the Mishnah to thirteen cardinal doctrines and a rational exegesis of Scripture. In his great work *The Guide for the Perplexed*, which though written in Arabic became in translation a Hebrew classic, he subjected Judaism to a rational inquiry in the spirit of Aristotle and Averroes, the Muslim scholastic philosopher. If this raised a long and bitter controversy with the literal Talmudists, it represented the most outstanding attempt on the part of Jewish scholarship to meet the intellectual challenge of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

### The Kabbala

Judaism, however, has never taken kindly either to metaphysics or to mysticism. Thus, prior to the ninth century, hardly any traces of mystical intuition are to be found in Jewish literature, and it was not until the thirteenth century that anything in the nature of a mystical movement became apparent in the search for secret wisdom and esoteric lore. The Hebrew word *Kabbalah*, meaning "that which is received", was used only of the tradition in Scripture until an attempt was made to associate it with a theosophic tradition by certain writers like Moses ben Nachman (1195-1270) and Moses de Leon (1250-1305). It was then applied to hidden and mysterious doctrines dealing with the nature of God and his relation to the world. Scriptural words and numbers were supposed to have a "deeper meaning", and from Gnosticism the mediating



powers of angelic beings and demiurges were adopted, while from Neoplatonism came the belief that all created things were emanations or outpourings from God as a pantheistic Absolute. The human soul was pre-existent, and after a series of reincarnations, aided by penitence and asceticism, it could return to its divine source in God. Charms and amulets were employed to ward off sickness and other evils, and divination was practised by the casting of lots, in support of which Biblical and Talmudic precedents could be quoted.

The most important Kabbalistic work is the *Zohar*, *The Book of Splendour*, written in Aramaic, and through a printer's error ascribed to Simeon ben Yohai, a rabbi of the second century. It was in fact a compilation extending over a considerable period in the form of a mystic commentary on the Pentateuch. It had a great vogue after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, and few books probably have been more widely read in Jewry. Although its influence has been on the wane for many years, it has played a conspicuous part in the Kabbala as an encyclopaedia of its doctrines and speculations, especially in times of persecution. Unquestionably the Kabbala has promoted prayer and spirituality in Judaism, but it has also encouraged magical superstitions and pretenders claiming to be Messiahs. In the eighteenth century a movement called Hasidim endeavoured to revive spiritual religion by emphasising the indwelling of God in the heart of man, as well as in the universe at large, apprehended by faith and attained by prayer and contemplation leading to a pantheistic absorption in the divine.

### Modern Judaism

The wave of anti-Semitism which engulfed the Jews, particularly in Central Europe, and marooned them in ghettos from the fourteenth century onwards, had the inevitable effect of producing a state of intellectual isolation and stagnation. The removal of civil disabilities in the nineteenth century opened the way for reformers, following in the wake of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), anxious to liberate Judaism from the bondage of the Talmud and to

rejuvenate it by the aid of modern knowledge and scholarship. Reform, however, was anathema to the orthodox, and nationalism, centring in the return of the exiles to their "Promised Land", remained predominant. It required only a fresh outbreak of persecution to arouse the latent Zionism to persistent action which culminated, in 1947, in the restoration of the State of Israel in Palestine with all the problems, religious, social, cultural, economic and political, that this triumph of the movement has raised, and which still await solution.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE RELIGIONS OF GREECE AND ROME

PASSING now from Palestine and Persia to the two classical civilizations of the West, Greece and Rome, we have to study a religious tradition which took shape under geographical conditions and historical circumstances that gave it a character of its own. The Hebrews and the Iranians were descended from wandering shepherd ancestors, Semitic in the one case and Indo-European in the other, who drove their flocks and herds from pasture to pasture before they settled in their respective cradlelands; the Hebrews, as we have seen, drifting into Palestine on the western edge of the Fertile Crescent, the Iranians settling in the mountains on its eastern border.

#### **The Rise of Civilization in Greece**

Like the Iranians, the people whom we call Greeks spoke an Aryan type of language akin to Latin, Sanskrit, and the Celtic and Teutonic tongues, and were in some measure descended from a group of tribes of Indo-European descent whose ancestors had infiltrated by degrees into Europe from the grasslands north and east of the Caspian Sea through southern Russia and along the Danube until eventually, probably about 2000 B.C., from the Balkans they reached the pleasant pastures of Thessaly. There stood Mount Olympus, which became the home of their gods, situated on the northern borders of Greece, or Hellas, as it was called. Having duly installed themselves in their home in the peninsula, they mixed with the prehistoric peoples they found there in the Middle Bronze Age, whose place-names suggest affinities with Anatolia in Asia Minor. They lived in isolation in loosely organized communities in narrow valleys, separated by mountain ranges and long gulfs from their neighbours, except by sea communications. Protected by these natural barriers they

developed a number of small city-states which never became united in a single nation or empire as in Egypt, Israel or Persia.

Each, in fact, was a sovereign state in itself, organized as a nation in miniature with a rich and varied culture and an intense local patriotism. But the absence of a centralized government with an absolute authority stabilized by religious sanctions made impossible anything in the nature of a divine kingship such as constituted the consolidating force in the Nile valley, or the covenant with Yahweh in Israel. Nevertheless, gradually a feeling of racial unity was acquired among these very diverse isolated groups of composite origin, so that by the seventh century B.C. they had adopted the term "Hellenes" in the belief that they were descended from a single mythical ancestress, Hellen, the daughter of Deucalion, very much as the Hebrews regarded themselves as the descendants of Jacob, from whom, too, they derived their name, Israel. Moreover, as the Jews called men who were not Israelites *goyim*, or Gentiles, so the later Greeks designated those who were not Hellenes as "barbarians", and the remnant of the earlier population who spoke their language as Pelasgians.

Early in the second millennium B.C. a non-Hellenic people, whom the classical poet Homer calls Achaeans, came into Greece, and in all probability it was they who created the culture in the south which was first revealed in modern times by the excavations conducted at Mycenae and Troy by a remarkable pioneer in Greek studies, Schliemann, whose unswerving belief in the historical reality of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* led him to dig up the remains of nine cities of Troy and then to proceed to Mycenae to bring to light the six royal shaft graves within its fortifications. This civilization has been appropriately named "Mycenaean" after the famous site (Mycenae) near Argos in the Peloponnese, the peninsula in southern Greece joined to the mainland by the isthmus of Corinth, and so very conveniently situated to become the connecting link between Greece and the adjacent islands in the Mediterranean.

## Minoan-Mycenaean Religion

Crete, with its succession of winds and currents making it accessible from the Delta of the Nile and Syria as well as from the Anatolian mainland and Cilicia, had become the natural centre of new cultural influences in the Eastern Mediterranean since late Neolithic times, when the impact on the indigenous substratum gave rise to a new civilization in about 3000 B.C. It was this which Sir Arthur Evans displayed when, in 1900, he began the systematic excavation at Knossos of the Palace of Minos, the traditional king of Crete, who is said to have "ruled the waves", his control of the seas opening the way for this brilliant "Minoan" civilization, as it has been aptly called by Evans, to spread in all directions over the Aegean world.<sup>1</sup> If at first the mainland lagged behind the islands, this was because Crete and the Cyclades were in regular communication with Egypt, Asia Minor and the rest of the Mediterranean from Syria to Sicily, Malta, Sardinia and North Africa, while the presence of shells from the Indian Ocean suggests still wider intercourse. However, the fleets of Crete and of Egypt maintained commercial relations with the coast of Greece, and by the middle of the second millennium B.C. the Mycenaean Age had dawned, and soon became a serious rival to Crete. Knossos and the other towns on the island, unlike Mycenae, Troy and Tiryns on the continent, never were fortified, doubtless because so long as Crete maintained her command of the seas she was reasonably secure from attack.

The priest-kings seem to have occupied a position comparable to that of the pharaohs as the divine controllers of the natural processes of fecundity and as the dynamic centre of the community. The sacred symbol of the Double-Axe carved on the walls and pillars of the palace at Knossos, and so familiar in Cretan cult scenes everywhere, has been variously interpreted as the weapon of the thunder-god, the sacrificial axe, or, as is more likely, the symbol of the sky-

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of this great excavation, and for general reference, the four large volumes of Sir Arthur Evans's *Palace of Minos* (1922-37) should be consulted.

god as the partner of the great Minoan Earth Mother, or the aniconic form of the Great Mother herself.

That a fertility *motif* was very prominent in Minoan religion is shown by the numerous brilliantly coloured figures in faience of the snake-goddess (Fig. 16) sometimes associated with a young consort or son in the Ishtar fashion. Baetyls (i.e. sacred pillars), standing alone or between sacred animals,



FIG. 16.—Minoan Snake-Goddesses.

or rising behind "horns of consecration" and in conjunction with the double-axe, the Cretan cult-sign comparable to the cross in Christianity, are of constant recurrence, often associated with a tree-cult; all emblems or embodiments of the Goddess and her worship. The cow and the calf typified her maternity, and the symbol of the Mountain-mother clad in a close-fitting bodice and flounced skirts with small waist like the figures of Cretan women in court scenes, is reminiscent of their counterparts similarly clad in Elizabethan England. Like the great gate at Mycenae,

sometimes she was protected with lions as her guardians. High and lifted up she stood, with extended hand holding the sceptre, indicative of her sovereign rule in the Minoan-Mycenaean cultus, and, indeed, in that of the Aegean region as a whole, where she reigned supreme.

### The Olympian Gods

In Greece, on the other hand, among the nomadic tribes of Indo-European descent who had settled, as we have seen, on the pastures of Thessaly under the shadow of Mount Olympus, their gods were essentially the mountain gods of the old invading Aryans. Behaving like Nordic chieftains, they broke in upon the royal splendours of the Aegean Minoan-Mycenaean palaces, and on the tribal life and culture in the pre-Hellenic villages in the south. They were essentially conquerors, as Professor Gilbert Murray has pointed out. "Zeus and his *comitatus* (i.e. retainers) conquered Cronos and his allies; conquered and expelled them—sent them migrating beyond the horizon, Heaven knows where. Zeus took the chief dominion and remained a permanent overlord, but he apportioned the kingdoms to his brothers Hades and Poseidon, and confirmed various of his children and followers in lesser fiefs. Apollo went off on his own adventure and conquered Delphi. Athena conquered the Giants. She gained Athens by a conquest over Poseidon", and there established herself as the goddess of the Athenians, the daughter of Zeus.

Having conquered their kingdoms, "Do they attend to the government? Do they promote agriculture, like the Mother-goddess? Do they practise trades and industries? Not a bit of it. Why should they do any honest work? They find it easier to live on the revenues and blast with thunderbolts the people who do not pay. They are conquering chieftains, royal buccaneers. They fight, and feast, and play, and make music; they drink deep, and roar with laughter at the lame smith who waits on them. They are never afraid, except of their own king. They never tell lies, except in love and war" (*Five Stages of Greek Religion*, pp. 66 f.).

Such were the Olympians of ancient Greece, as they are

described by their great interpreter Homer, who wrote probably somewhere about 850 B.C., but who recorded events in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* which happened very much earlier. The peaceful Minoan civilization collapsed about 1400 B.C. The cause of its downfall is uncertain, but while earthquakes may have been partly responsible, the Mycenaean bid for mastery of the Aegean is the most likely explanation of the destruction of Knossos, Phaestos, Hagia Triada, Gournia, Mallia and Zakson in Crete, all of which showed signs of violence. Small towns in the eastern part of the island appear to have survived, but the Minoan civilization never recovered from the break-up of the Palace kingdoms. The hegemony in the Aegean passed to the mainland, where Mycenae from 1600 B.C. had become increasingly the centre of urban culture in the eastern Mediterranean, commanding a main artery of communication between the south-east and the north-west. There East and West met, and it was this Mycenaean civilization, dating from about 1600 to 1200 B.C., that constituted the background of Homer's *Iliad*.

### The Homeric Tradition

It may seem curious, therefore, that while the Mycenaean Age in many respects is accurately depicted in the Homeric legends, nothing is said about the worship of the Mother-goddess, which was so prominent in that period, and recurred in the later stages of Greek religion. Thus, the Acropolis at Athens was built in honour of Athena, an Olympian goddess with a name which may be of Mycenaean origin, and under the temple traces of a Mycenaean royal palace have been found. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, again, is not Greek in her name or nature. She, too, may have taken her origin from the same source, as in the Homeric poems her home is placed in Cyprus where Mycenaean influences were strongly felt after the Dorian invasion of Greece in 1000 B.C., and where the Semitic goddess Astarte was firmly entrenched. It would seem, therefore, that when Homer wrote, the myth and ritual of the Aegean had been so overlaid by the Olympian tradition that the earlier fertility cult had been concealed.



Thus, the ancient writer, Herodotus, "the father of history", maintained that "Homer and Hesiod created the generation of the gods for the Greeks, and gave them their names and distinguished their offices and crafts, and portrayed their shapes", thereby indicating that he was unaware of the existence of the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization and its religion. For the Greek, Homer and the Homeric legends occupied a place similar to that which David and the Psalms held in Hebrew tradition. These stories of the brave days of old were sung in the courts of princes in Ionia, and later were transferred to public festivals. They were the work of several generations of singers before they were written down between 850 and 750 B.C. and attributed to Homer and the peasant-poet Hesiod in much the same way as the Psalms were thought to have been written by David.

These excellent stories, told magnificently, made the Olympian gods the emblems of glorified humanity and, from the sixth century B.C. onwards, inspired sculptors to fashion them in idealized forms of exquisite beauty. In this sense it is true that Homer and Hesiod provided the inspiration which led to the gods of ancient Greece acquiring a form and significance that have lived on throughout the ages. But it was beauty of form rather than excellence of character that gave them survival value. With the dawn of the Age of Reason the crude mythology that had gathered round them put them out of court for serious consideration, except as metaphors and symbols of an ideal reality, as already they had proved to be inadequate for the deeper needs of religion.

### **The Mystery Religions**

Thus, it was to the earlier Minoan-Mycenaean tradition rather than to that of the Homeric Olympian theology that men turned in the sixth century B.C. in search of spiritual satisfaction when new forces and movements, religious, political and economic, were rapidly changing the outlook of the populace in Greece, and the Secret Societies, known as Mystery Religions, were making a very strong appeal because they offered salvation to those who

were initiated into them by means of ceremonial purification, ascetic practices and the esoteric knowledge imparted during the rites. All this was in sharp contrast with the Olympian cults based on gods who protected the tribe or the city-state, or the family, but had little or no concern with individuals, and with whom personal relations were never sought. Ionian poets, it is true, succeeded in rationalizing the Olympian mythology and in removing the elements of the supernatural from it, humanizing the gods until they virtually ceased to be gods. The idea of divine Power compensated for that which was lacking in them as personal beings. This became a belief in Fate, while all that remained beyond the chances and changes of this present world was a deep sleep. Thus, the way was opened for the Ionian philosophers to reject completely the mythic tradition in their search for a single source of, and a unifying principle in, the material universe. They and their successors might pour scorn upon votaries of mystery cults who lived by doctrines, mythologies and rituals professing to purify from evil, and, as was said, to secure for an initiated thief a more blissful hereafter than that meted out to an uninitiated just man. But the movement spread because it met an urgent human need.

To be led by an initiating priest from strength to strength and stage to stage along the mystery path gave a sense of assurance in life's pilgrimage here and hope beyond the grave. This union with a mythological divinity who was supposed to have lived on earth, died and been restored to life again was achieved by means that were essentially barbaric in character and origin, though they frequently became spiritualized and allegorized to a high degree in their later developments. They included purifications, mortifications, the beholding of sacred objects and dramatic events rather like a passion play today, for the purpose of attaining a state of religious ecstasy and hallucination at the culmination of the rites, sometimes taking the form of a tumultuous worship, for this kind of experience is infectious. As Professor Nilsson says, "there exists in every man, however humble his station, a dormant longing to enter into communion with the divine, to feel himself

lifted up from the temporal into the spiritual. This form of ecstasy found its herald in the god who, with Apollo, impressed himself most strongly upon the religious feeling of the age—Dionysos" (*A History of Greek Religion* (1925, p. 205)).

### The Dionysiac

The Dionysiac religion, though known to Homer, was of Thracian origin, and did not make its way into Greece until after the Homeric period, becoming established as a public ritual in the seventh or sixth century B.C. It was, however, a foreign intrusion and was regarded with the gravest suspicion and hostility by Greeks of the Homeric tradition. In the first instance Dionysos probably came from the north, though he seems to be a composite figure, with Phrygian as well as Thracian elements. Very likely he may have absorbed some of the characteristic features of the religion of Asia Minor with its deeply laid vegetation and fertility rituals. But he was very much more than a vegetation-god, however much he may have displayed these functions and attributes as a deity of the powers of nature with his very considerable clientèle of female votaries. It was they, in fact, who were very largely responsible for bringing his cult into disrepute, since they were wont to assemble on mountains and in remote places to engage in frenzies for the purpose of surmounting the barrier separating the human and the supernatural orders. With the aid of thrilling music, phallic symbols, the free use of wine and giddy dances in the light of torches, they surrendered themselves during their nocturnal revels body and soul to those mighty powers that transcend time and space, and the personal life of man. Devouring the raw flesh of bulls and calves in a savage sacramental rite, or *omophagia*, in which Dionysos under the name of Zagreus was believed to be present, they felt themselves to be so united with him that they proclaimed themselves to be *Bacchoi*, Bacchus being another name for Dionysos. In these orgies the *maenads*, or votaries, took "the kingdom of God by force", as it were, and having broken through all the outer defences they found salvation and satisfaction in that divine union which is the goal of all sacramental mysticism.

## Orphism

It was under the influence of another movement centred in a Thracian hero, Orpheus, that the Dionysiac gradually became sobered as it spread in Greece in the sixth century. In Thrace Orpheus was a legendary musician who originally probably had no connexion with Dionysos. Around him a very considerable literature has gathered which has come to be known as Orphic. Its precise significance, however, is a matter of debate among classical scholars, as will be seen if reference is made to Dr. I. M. Linforth's discussion of the problem in his *Arts of Orpheus*, published by the California University Press in 1941. Nevertheless, while a great deal of the available information about the movement that is called Orphism (perhaps not very accurately) is gleaned from relatively late sources, that a mystery ritual was associated with the Thracian hero which acquired a Dionysian character, and eventually became incorporated in the Olympian mythology, is reasonably clear.

As the composite legend took shape it was alleged that Zeus, by Semele, a Phrygian Earth-goddess, one of his many mistresses, had a son, Zagreus, whom he intended to establish as the ruler of the world. To prevent this an ancient brood of Giants, the Titans, were urged by Hera, the wife of Zeus, to kill the infant and devour him. This they did, and in his anger Zeus destroyed them with his thunderbolts and made the human race from their ashes. As they had feasted upon Zagreus there was a divine element in their mortal remains from which mankind arose, mingled with an evil nature derived from the Titans. Athena having secured the heart of the child, she brought it to Zeus, who swallowed it and from it caused Dionysos to be reborn as a second Zagreus.

Around this crude story, the origins of which are obscure, a cultus developed which, when stripped of its primitive rites and spiritualized under Orphic influence, inculcated a lofty conception of immortality through rebirth and regeneration to a higher life having as its aim the eradication of the evil Titanic nature and the realization of divinity by the cultivation of the Dionysian element in

man. This was accomplished by participation in the rites of initiation and purification, called *teletai*, and living in accordance with the precepts of the Orphic way of life, which included apparently prohibitions concerning eating meat and other articles of diet, in combination with a relatively high standard of ethical conduct. It was from this source that Plato derived his notion of the dual nature of man, made up of a divine soul imprisoned in a mortal body. His master mind carried the spiritualization to a higher stage by relating the soul to the Good as the Supreme Soul, substituting for ritual tabus a disciplined life in philosophic quest of Reality. Instead of initiation into a mystery cult, for Plato the way of communion with the divine lay in following righteousness, justice and choosing the good. He had nothing but scorn for votaries who lived by unethical rituals and doctrines, but the immense success of these un-Hellenic cults bears witness to the intense desire of the masses in Greece for a way of salvation and communion with the spiritual world in a concrete manner that would lead at least to the Elysian Fields. Hence the popularity of the Dionysiac and the movement that is comprehended under the name of Orphism.

### The Eleusinia

There was, however, also another mystery which, if less spectacular, ethical and mystical than these foreign cults, was rooted and grounded in the soil of Greece. This was held at Eleusis on the coast near Athens, and may have arisen from a very ancient agricultural festival celebrating the bringing up of the threshold corn from the underground repositories (silos) where after the harvest in June it had been stored to ripen until the seed-time in October. During the four months of summer, when it was below ground, the fields were barren and desolate, withered by the scorching sun. Once the autumn rains began, ploughing started and the fields soon became green again in the mild winter with the crops ripening in early spring, about February or March. It was then that the annual commemoration of the dead was held in Athens, called the Anthesteria, named after the flowers that appeared at

that season. This event coincided with the Lesser Mysteries of Demeter, the Earth-goddess and Corn-mother, a daughter of Zeus, and her daughter Persephone, otherwise Kore, the Corn-maiden. These were held at Agrai, a suburb of Athens, where Demeter had a shrine. Attendance at the rites was preliminary to initiation at the Greater Mysteries at Eleusis in the autumn, which no doubt was originally and primarily an agricultural ritual to secure the fertility of the crops.

The myth tells of the abduction of Kore as she was gathering flowers in the meadows, by Hades, the Lord of the land of the dead, who carried her off to his subterranean realm. Her sorrowing mother, Demeter, wandered throughout the world in search of her, carrying a torch to light up the dark recesses where she might be concealed. Such was her grief that she withheld her fructifying gifts from the earth till universal famine was threatened. Eventually she came to Eleusis, having changed herself into an old woman. There she sat down by a well, called the Fountain of Maidenhood, where she was encountered by the daughters of the king, Keleos, to whom she told a fictitious story about her escape from pirates. Having won their confidence, she was taken home by them and became nurse to their baby brother, Demophoon, or Iacchos. To make him immortal she secretly anointed him with ambrosia, a life-giving agent, the food of the gods, and at night bathed him in the fire to burn away his mortality. One night, however, she was disturbed in these fiery operations by his mother Metaneira, the wife of the king, who, seeing her child in the fire, screamed with terror. Thereupon Demeter revealed her identity, and, although Demophoon could no longer be exempt from death or old age, he and the place where she had been hospitably received would be honoured. There at Eleusis on the hill above the Fountain a temple and altar were to be erected in which the rites she would teach them to secure immortality might be practised. Meanwhile the gods had intervened on behalf of Kore, who was released from the underworld, but unfortunately Hades surreptitiously had given her some pomegranate seeds to eat which bound her

to him for one-third of the year. Amid general rejoicing she returned in a golden chariot to live on the earth with her mother for the rest of the time, and Demeter rejoined the gods on Olympus.

In the form in which the story is told in the so-called Homeric Hymn, assigned to the seventh century B.C. or later, there is a good deal of confusion and intermingling of myths. Demeter, as her name suggests, is of Greek origin, but the cult and its legend are unquestionably pre-Hellenic. As the personification of the fertile soil she was the Earth-mother whose daughter Kore, the Corn-maiden, later became confused with Persephone, queen of hades and wife of Pluto, whose name connected him with Pluton, a god of the fruits of the fertile soil. Thus, Kore was transformed into Persephone and made responsible for sending up the new crops from below ground by her annual return from the nether regions. This gave the earlier agricultural rites a deeper meaning, associating them with the death and resurrection drama, as in their counter-parts in the Ancient Middle East, which we have already examined (Chapter II). The germinating ear of corn then became the symbol of life renewed, and the celebration at Eleusis, in the month of Boedromion (approximately September) at the autumn sowing, gave to those who were initiated into the Greater Mysteries an assurance of a joyful hereafter in the delectable meadows of Persephone, secured by means of a protracted series of arresting rites and preliminary purifications.

As regards the form these ceremonies and revelations took, the available information comes mainly from relatively late sources. It would seem, however, that the *mystae*, as the candidates for initiation were called, underwent a course of instruction in the mystic secret knowledge of the cult, accompanied by purifications and asceticisms of various kinds, before they were led forth in procession along the Sacred Way from Athens to Eleusis, performing appropriate rites at the shrines, temples and baths which lined the route. On arrival they bathed in the sea and roamed about the shore with lighted torches in imitation of Demeter's search for Persephone in the myth. After an

all-night vigil they repaired to the Hall of Initiation (*Telesterion*) where, veiled in darkness and sitting upon stools covered with sheep-skins, in complete silence they beheld and handled certain sacred objects and witnessed some kind of dramatic performance, probably depicting episodes in the life and sufferings of the sorrowing Mother-goddess. According to a post-Christian writer Hippolytus, the secret ceremonies included the reaping of an ear of corn in a blaze of light, and the proclamation of the birth of a divine child called Brimos from someone called Brimo. Whether or not this incident had anything to do with a sacred marriage between Zeus and Demeter, symbolized by the union of the hierophant and the chief-priestess in their respective roles, can only be conjectured.

In any case, there is good reason to think that behind the Eleusinian mysteries, which are certainly very ancient, going back in origin apparently to Mycenaean times, lay a vegetation ritual to promote the fertility of the crops. Second-century Christian writers may have depended upon Gnostic sources for their information, and have confused the mysteries of Demeter with those of another similar Phrygian divinity, Attis, but, nevertheless, a corn-token very likely may have been one of the sacred objects revealed to the initiates, and the history and setting of the cult suggest that originally it was in the nature of a harvest festival in which those who took part were also regenerated year by year. We know that the marriage of Zeus with goddesses in Greek tradition were expressions of the ancient belief in the union of heaven and earth whereby the earth was fertilized. A very primitive liturgy of this kind seems to occur in the formula preserved by the Neoplatonist writer, Proclus, in the fifth century A.D., in which, during the Eleusinian rites, the Athenians are said to have gazed up to the sky and cried aloud, "Rain!", and then, looking down to the ground, to have shouted, "Conceive". Late and obscure though the formula is, it has every indication of being, as Dr. Farnell says, "the genuine ore of an old religious stratum sparkling all the more for being found in a waste deposit of Neoplatonic metaphysic".

Thus, it is highly probable that the seasonal drama



theme, so prominent in the Fertile Crescent, with its sacred marriage and renewal rituals, recurred at Eleusis. While this very decorous mystery was essentially Greek in origin, vested as a hereditary possession in ancient Eleusinian priestly families, to whom application had to be made for initiation, and confined to those who could speak and understand the Greek language, it incorporated at some time the Phrygian Dionysos as Demeter's associate in the guise of the divine child Iacchos. But it never acquired the tumultuous character of the Dionysian orgies. Its attraction lay in its offer of the attainment of a serener life together with the hope of a better death and blissful immortality, as Cicero recognized. The ultimate aim of initiation was rebirth to a blessed hereafter—"Happy and blessed one, thou shalt be a god instead of a mortal". In these words was set forth the essential purpose of the mystery, and, indeed, of all mystery religions, whatever may have been their respective origins and methods.

### The Delphic Oracle

Now this conception of the salvation of the individual was completely foreign to the spirit of either Greek or Roman religion. The literary geniuses of the fifth century in Greece—Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Pindar—were content to regard the unhappy lot of man as the result of the divine decrees of an inexorable Fate, even though Zeus might be sometimes represented as overruling the course of events in the administration of a cosmic and human justice—the right ordering of things. To determine the will of the gods, and to obtain information about current and future happenings, recourse was made to divination, and for this purpose Delphi was the centre *par excellence*. For a thousand years of recorded history the Greeks and Romans consulted the prophetess, called the Pythia (the old name of Delphi), seated on her tripod as the mouthpiece of Apollo, a son of Zeus by a very ancient goddess, Leto, probably of western Asiatic origin.

Before he became an expert in prophecy, Apollo seems to have been a god of the herdsmen, and in all probability long before he occupied the Delphic shrine it had had an

oracular tradition, going back to the Minoan-Mycenaean period, and associated with the Earth-goddess, Ge-Themis. There, until the middle of the fifth century, Greek law-makers learnt the divine will, while those bent on founding colonies, launching wars, or seeking the fortunes of dynasties, had referred their causes to the judgment of the Pythian god, Apollo, since the beginning of the eighth century B.C. On the orgiastic Dionysiac it exercised a moderating influence, because at Delphi inspiration took a different form from that manifested in the Thraco-Phrygian frenzies.

When an oracle was required, the inspired prophetess (Pythia) arrayed herself in long robes, a golden head-dress, and a wreath of laurel-leaves. She then drank of the sacred spring, Kassotis, and, according to late accounts of the procedure, she seated herself on a tripod over a vaporous cleft in a chasm or cave below, unless she actually entered the cave to encounter the vapour. This enabled her to attain a state of ecstasy. As there are, however, no references to this form of intoxication earlier than the fourth century B.C., and archaeological investigation of the site has not produced any conclusive evidence of clefts in the shrine, the actual cause of the phenomenon remains conjectural. But whatever it may have been, words were uttered by the Pythia, interpreted and often written down in hexameters as oracles of Zeus given through Apollo by the agency of the prophetess. So great became its fame that all Greece consulted the oracle for information on every conceivable subject—cult-procedure, politics, law, disease, and everyday affairs, public and personal. To it resorted foreign kings in times of crisis and stress, and even Socrates turned to it for guidance and regarded himself as always in the service of Apollo.

Its influence, therefore, as a unifying centre of supreme oracular authority was immense in the welter of city-states. It lacked, however, any ultimate sanction other than the pronouncements of the Pythia announcing the purposes of Zeus. When these failed to be justified in practice the prestige of the oracle declined, and, after the Persian wars, when it proved unequal to the exacting

demands made upon it, it gradually lost the confidence of the nation. In the Hellenistic period, after the death of Alexander the Great in 323, it became little more than a local court of appeal on doubtful questions touching the gods and moral conduct. Despite a temporary revival in the second century B.C., and in the first century A.D., it never regained its earlier influence, and in A.D. 390 the temple was finally closed by Theodosius.

### Plato and Aristotle

That it survived so long is an indication of the persistence of the oracular tradition in the Graeco-Roman world. Like the mysteries, it supplied what the official State cults lacked by establishing a means of personal intercourse between man and the gods. Even such profound thinkers as Plato and Aristotle failed to meet the fundamental needs of the human spirit in its religious quest. For Plato, God was the Ultimate Reality responsible for the orderly motions of the universe, but it was not until his conception of Deity as the supremely "good soul" was transformed into that of the immutable Absolute by Plotinus and the Neoplatonists in the third century A.D., and in this form was reinterpreted by the Christian Fathers and St. Augustine in terms of the doctrine of the Incarnation, that Greek philosophy became the handmaid of religion.

Similarly, the attempt on the part of his great successor, Aristotle, to make God the Prime Mover Who is Himself unmoved, the first and final cause of all things, was of little use for the purposes of religion until it was brought into line with Hebrew and Christian theism by St. Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages. Thus, while Greek philosophy gave a philosophical content to the idea of God of inestimable value and significance for the history of religion, it was never a serious rival to the popular appeal of the mystery cults or the Delphic oracle, even though it never denied the existence of the Olympian gods and their mythology. There the philosophic movement in Greece differed from the prophetic tradition in Israel and the Christian faith which emerged within Judaism and then spread throughout the Graeco-Roman world. In both of these religions,

as also most emphatically in Islam, the earlier polytheistic myth and ritual were officially definitely repudiated, however much the pagan cultus may have lingered on in popular practice under a veneer of Christianity. Indeed, it was because Graeco-Roman religion never ceased to be polytheistic that certain aspects of it survived so long in Christendom.

### Ancient Roman Religion

When the Indo-European Celtic tribes who had come into Italy in the second millennium B.C. eventually crossed the Apennines and settled on the banks of the Tiber, they became known as Latins. There, in the eighth century B.C., they came into contact with a kindred group called Sabines from the hills to the east, while, to the north, Etruscan invaders from Asia Minor had established themselves in that is still called Tuscany, and also on the Campania. There they became neighbours of the Latins, and in the sixth century B.C. had a considerable influence in Rome. In the south and in Sicily numerous Greek settlements arose after the Dorian invasion of Greece at the beginning of the millennium. The net result of all these immigrations was the gradual development of a composite culture in which a number of religious traditions were superimposed on the relatively simple animistic cult of the Latin farmers.

Being engaged mainly in agriculture their chief pre-occupation was with the fields, the farm and the homestead. Therefore, it was around them that their religion was centred. Even the stones called *termini* marking the boundaries of their property were regarded as sacred, as they were also among the Hebrews (Dt. xix. 14), and on February 22nd a festival was held in their honour. During it, sacrifices were offered to the indwelling supernatural power or influence, called *numen*, very much as in Melanesia sacred objects were venerated because they were thought to be endowed with *mana* (cf. Chap. I, p. 11). As the *numen* acquired personality it became a spiritual being and finally a god, the *deus Terminus*, though the divinity was never given any form of iconic representation. In the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill at Rome in later

days stood an ancient boundary-stone open to the sky, which in all probability had been a centre of worship long before it found a home in the temple of the sky- and weather-god, the Roman counterpart of the Greek Zeus and the Vedic Dyaus Pitar.

In addition to the cult of sacred stones, rivers, springs, groves and trees, all had their *numina* and appropriate rites, as had the hearth, the door, the store-cupboard, and the homestead in general and the farm-fields. These had their own names—Vesta, Ianus, Penates, Lar Familiaris and Lares—and their particular functions in the life of the home and the farm. Ianus, at the door, protected the house; Vesta, the hearth-spirit, was the centre of family life, as have been the home-fires since Palaeolithic times; while the Penates, guarding its food stores, kept in safety the food Vesta cooked, and upon which the household depended for its sustenance. As Warde Fowler says, "together they represent the material vitality of the family". Over the entire homestead the Lar Familiaris exercised watch and ward, just as the Lares, from having the care of the fields extended their dominion until it covered the entire estate. Finally there was the Genius, a name meaning "begetter", or virility in man, signifying his reproductive powers for the continuance of the family. Therefore, since the Genius exercised his life-giving functions in respect of the generation of the human species, he was connected with the marriage-bed, though he was also a kind of guardian angel who was duly venerated by each individual on his own birthday. On the birthday of the head of the family special honour was paid to the Genius of the Paterfamilias, and later, in the State cult, this practice played an important part in the worship of the Genius of the Emperor.

Although ancient Roman religion lacked the emotional appeal of a personal salvation so conspicuous in the Greek mysteries, nevertheless it made for the consolidation of domestic life by uniting the family in a spiritual unity in relation to the spirits controlling and guarding the household and its avocations. This relationship between the family and its spirits was called *pietas*, and lay at the root of the Roman conception of virtue. Therefore, the highest

duty was the punctilious observance of the prescribed rites whereby *pietas* was maintained. This eventually was extended to the State cult and its gods, to whom respect and duty became incumbent upon all Romans. Indeed, *religio*, from which our word "religion" is derived, was a "binding together" in a mutual obligation, first in a family relation and common life, and then in the community at large organized on an institutional basis with its prescribed ritual to maintain peaceful relations with the gods—the *pax deorum*, as it was called.

### The State Cult

The State cult, in fact, was really the continuation of the religion of the farm and the field adapted to urban conditions and subject to considerable modification by foreign influences. The rites connected with the hearth, for instance, survived as the expression of the communal life rather than that of particular households. Therefore they were transferred to a temple in the Forum at Rome as the hearth of the State, served by six Vestal Virgins dedicated to the sacred office from childhood. Originally it is said there were only four of them, and at first the care of the fire may have been assigned to the daughters of the king or chief. In historical times they were selected from the patrician class descended from the earlier Roman settlers, and vowed to the cult for thirty years. During the period of their vocation they lived together in the Hall of Vesta (*atrium Vestae*), and on pain of death they were compelled to maintain a celibate life of absolute chastity, tending the sacred fire which must never be allowed to go out, except when it was solemnly extinguished on the last day of February and rekindled on March 1st. They were also in charge of the storehouse (*penus*), and left their Atrium only to fulfil their various religious duties, such as taking the new corn to be roasted and ground, and officiating at similar agricultural celebrations. When they did appear in public they were treated with the greatest reverence and awe, being as they were the highest expression of Roman sanctity.

The holy door, Ianus, also had its place in the Forum as.

a ceremonial arched gateway at the north corner which was kept open in time of war and closed on the few occasions when universal peace prevailed. The Penates, as we have seen, had their quarters in the Hall of Vesta, and Juppiter was enthroned in his temple on the Capitol on the site of the first temple in Rome, erected, according to tradition, by Etruscan workmen and dedicated in 509 B.C. to him, and also to Juno and Minerva. Later it was assigned solely to Juppiter Optimus Maximus, the greatest of all the Juppi- ters, and the counterpart of Zeus. As the chief god of Latium and guardian of the city, he absorbed the functions and attributes of the local *numina* and gods, and in his Capitoline temple he was served by his own priest, the *Flamen Dialis*, who was so holy and completely devoted to his office that he and his wife, the *Flaminica*, were surrounded with endless tabus. Thus, he was required always to wear his vestments, keep his head uncovered in the open air, never to ride or touch a horse, come near a corpse and certain animals (e.g. goat, or a dog), or walk under a vine lest its tendrils (being like knots) should enfold him. Indeed, his life was one long ritual routine, as was that of the *Flaminica*.

The two associates of Juppiter, Mars and Quirinus, also had their *Flamines*. Being originally an agricultural *numen* protecting the fields before he became a war-god, Mars was besought at the spring lustration to make the crops flourish, preserve the shepherds and their flocks, and to give health and prosperity to the household. In March his priests, called *salii* or "leapers", engaged in a war-like dance in the streets of Rome, leaping and carrying shields, clothed in the full religious dress of a warrior and making stations at fixed points. It is possible that originally this had a magical significance, the jumping being for the purpose of making the crops grow high and the war-dance to keep the forces of evil at bay. But Mars, like Quirinus, certainly was a military deity notwithstanding his agricultural background.

### Etruscan and Greek Influences

Under Etruscan influence in the sixth century B.C. new gods appeared, such as Diana, the sylvan goddess of the

forests and the glades and the mistress of the mountains and of wild animals, whose strange worship in her Arician grove at Nemi in the Alban hills has been immortalized by Macaulay and Frazer. Whatever may lie behind the curious rule of her grim priesthood, requiring the occupant to take possession of the grove by killing his predecessor and then reigning in lonely seclusion until he himself should be slain, Diana was an arboreal deity before she left Nemi for her temple on the Aventine hill in Rome. In her Aventine sanctuary she was embodied in a wooden statue, said to be a copy of the image of Artemis at Marsilia, which in its turn was a replica of that at Ephesus to which reference is made in the Acts of the Apostles (xix. 35). When she left her Etruscan haunts she became identified with the Greek Artemis as a Moon-goddess, and finally became a form of Isis when, at the beginning of the Christian era, the Egyptian sister-spouse of Osiris absorbed all the female deities as "the goddess of many names", and "the highest *numen* unconquerable".

### The Sibylline Oracles

In the sixth century B.C. the Etruscan kings of Rome are said to have introduced into the capital a collection of oracles constituting the Sibylline Books. These purported to be the inspired utterances of women known as Sibyls who were thought to have derived their inspiration from Apollo, like the Pythia at Delphi. The earliest of them, however, was alleged to be "the Sibyl of Erythrae" in Asia Minor, who, if she existed at all, lived probably in the seventh century B.C. From Asia Minor the movement spread to Greece, where in the sixth and fifth centuries floating oracular *dicta*, emanating from a weird ecstatic female, flourished in connexion with the Orphic movement. Thence it spread to Italy with the cult of Apollo and became established, probably by Greek settlers, at Cumae on the coast near Naples. There a temple was said to have been dedicated in 493 in response to directions found in the Sibylline Books which a strange old woman had succeeded in selling at an exorbitant price to the last of the Tarquin kings after she had burnt the earlier collection of prophecies



which he had refused to purchase. This legend may preserve the memory of the foundation of the Cumaeae temple in the fifth century under Sibylline influence when Greek settlers were beginning to introduce the oracles into Italy. Early in the Republic a considerable store of them preserved in Rome was destined to play an important part in the introduction of Greek gods and their worship in the city.

### The Great Mother of Phrygia

Thus, in the disturbances that occurred in the fifth century, during the struggle for the restoration of the Etruscan dynasty, the Sibylline Books were consulted. As a result, the cult of the Greek deities Demeter, Dionysos and Kore was established, latinized as that of Ceres, Liber and Libera, with temples on the Aventine, erected between 496 and 493 B.C. Nearly three hundred years later, after a violent storm of pebble-rain in the strenuous days of the Hannibalic war in 205 B.C., recourse again was made to the Books, and the symbol of the Phrygian Great Mother, Cybele, in the form of a sacred meteoric stone, was ordered to be brought from its home in Pessinus to Rome. On its arrival it was received with great solemnity and carried in procession to the temple of Victoria until a separate edifice was erected in honour of the goddess on the Palatine in 191 B.C.

By this time the greater part of the Greek pantheon had made its appearance among the Romans, many of them under Sibylline influence. Besides those already mentioned, Aphrodite became Venus, Asklepios was latinized as Aesculapius, Apollo had long been established at Cumae, as we have seen, and from there he was installed in Rome, Herakles became Hercules, and the divine twins, Castor and Pollux, were originally sons of Zeus and Leda, the Greek Dioscuri. But these additions to and transformations of the older *numina* did not materially alter the Graeco-Roman religious tradition. With the advent of the Phrygian Great Mother, however, coupled with the worship of Dionysos under the name of Bacchus, a very different situation arose. These oriental mystery cults were highly emotional in character, as in the case of the Dionysiac in

Greece. Thus, no sooner had Cybele found a home in Rome than strange sights were beheld in the streets on her Annual Festival, the Magalesia. "Borne from her sacred precinct in her car, she drove a yoke of lions", Lucretius tells us, followed by her mutilated priests (*galli*), who, like the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel in Israel, cut themselves with knives to the strains of outlandish music of the Phrygian pipe and cymbals, leaping and dancing in their frenzy (Ovid, *Fasti*, iv. 257 ff., 291 ff.).

Hardly less orgiastic was the Bacchanalia which became a scandal in 185 B.C., akin as it was to the wild Thracian rites of Dionysos-Zagreus. According to the Latin historian, Livy, in these debaucheries "men as though frenzied, uttered soothsaying with a fanatical tossing of their bodies; matrons attired as Bacchantes with hair loosed, rushed to the Tiber with blazing torches" (xxxix. 8-19). This was dealt with summarily by the Roman senate and promptly suppressed, though concessions were made to individuals who applied to the authorities for permission to take part in the rites provided that not more than five persons were to be present at them. In the case of the Cybele celebrations, no Roman citizen was permitted to join in them, and the rites were confined to the precincts of the temple of Victoria, until gradually they were sobered, and then dramatic performances in honour of the goddess were instituted for the populace. But it was not until the reign of Claudius, or possibly later in the second century A.D., that the cult was officially recognized. Then a crude Easter drama was held from March 15th to 27th, representing Cybele finding her youthful companion, Attis, in the reeds of a Phrygian river, the veneration of the pine-tree under which in the legend he was said to have castrated himself and so caused his death. After a day of fasting in commemoration of his tragic end (when the archgallus cut his arm, symbolizing the former mutilation of the initiates amid general lamentation), sorrow was turned into joy in the evening with the announcement of the resurrection of Attis. The following day, known as the Hilaria, was observed with feasting and merriment, the rites concluding with the bathing of the goddess.

In this resurrection drama the initiates at some point appear to have undergone a ceremonial regeneration as a process of new birth, symbolized perhaps by their going down into the bridal chamber, or cave-sanctuary, of the goddess, from which they emerged reborn to a higher life. A more drastic experience was that of the *Taurobolium* held in the sanctuary of Cybele on the Vatican hill on March 28th. The neophyte stood in a pit under a grating on which a bull was stabbed to death so that its blood poured all over his body. As a result of this ordeal he was regenerated for twenty years, or, as one inscription affirms, he was "reborn for ever", presumably as Attis.

Whether or not a sacramental meal played a significant part in the fusion of the mortal with the divinity in addition to this coarser blood-ritual is very difficult to say. A Christian writer, Firmicus Maternus, makes an Attis votary declare that he had "eaten out of a timbrel", and "drunk out of a cymbal", but precisely what was eaten and drunk, or for what purpose, is not specified. It may have been bread partaken of as the very body of the divinity of Attis, identified with the "cornstalk", as Dr. Farnell surmised. But there is little evidence in support of this conjecture. Similarly, while according to Clement of Alexandria the Eleusinian initiates had to affirm that they had drunk a gruel of water and meal called *kykeon*, no explanation is given as to when and why they had so done.

### The Isis Mystery

In the Isis mysteries which were introduced into the Empire from Egypt and obtained official recognition in the reign of Caligula about A.D. 38, a mystical death and resurrection, in which no mention is made of sacramental meals, formed the central act in initiation. Thus, in the curious folk-tale related by Apuleius, an African writer in the second century A.D., in his *Metamorphoses*, or *Golden Ass*, Lucius, the hero, who describes his experiences, says he was taken by night into the inner chamber of the temple of Isis. There, by the aid of a sacred drama and occult methods, he was brought face to face with the gods to receive mystic revelations and witness certain sacred rites which he was

not permitted to divulge. Having penetrated to the boundaries of the earth, he approached the threshold of the underworld (Proserpine or Hades) and at midnight he saw the "sun gleaming with bright light and worshipped." In the morning he appeared in the full array of an initiate of the Sun-god, with whom he seems to have become identified, rather than with Isis, before entering her service. Two more initiations followed, and then his resurrection to a future life of blessedness became assured.

### Mithraism

Finally, in the first century A.D., Mithraism began to make its way into the Empire from Persia, with its Zoroastrian background, and was energetically propagated from the Danube to Spain and from Africa to Britain, until the third century, when it rapidly declined before the rising tide of Christianity (Fig. 17). Here, unquestionably the strong appeal it made, especially to the Roman army, lay in the sacramental power it professed to supply to enable its initiates not only to fight victoriously on the field of battle but also against their own passions and temptations. With the aid of a ritual meal, and by a series of ascents, they rose at length to the celestial sphere, to be welcomed by Mithra, the unconquered warrior (*sol invictus*), who never grew old or lost his vigour. By the sacrifice of the sacred bull he liberated life to nature and mankind, and in the dualistic struggle with the powers of darkness and evil he shed his heavenly radiance and offered a renewal of light and life and strength to all who embraced his way of salvation. Unquestionably Mithraism met a very real spiritual need, but when it came to an open conflict with Christianity it fell, because Mithras at his best was but a member of a polytheistic hierarchy, and therefore without difficulty it was incorporated in the pagan family of cults. In this way it won Imperial favour, but it was destined to extinction in the fourth century because of its own inherent weakness and seeds of decay.

All that it and the other pagan mysteries offered in a renewal of life and strength in this world and the next Christianity supplied, but instead of a polytheistic myth-

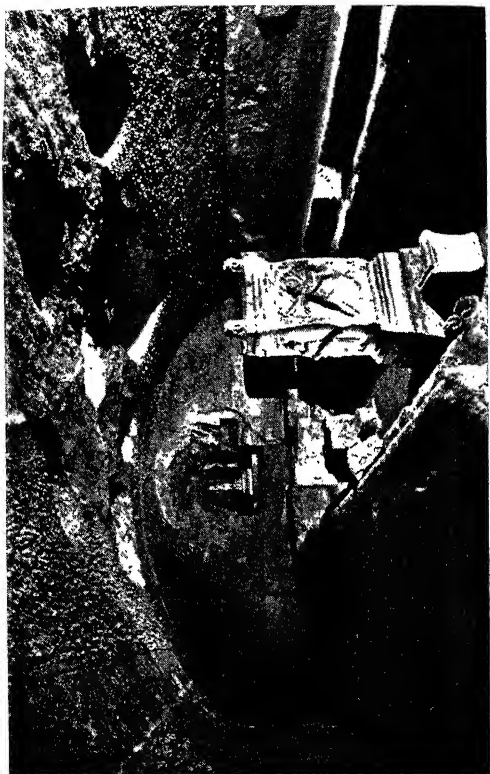


FIG. 17.—Mithraic Temple at San Clemente, Rome.

ology it based its claim on a living historical Founder with a firmly established monotheistic and ethical background in Judaism. As the pagan cults gravitated more and more towards the Roman State and sought Imperial recognition, Christianity not only stood aloof but stressed its opposition to the civic power and its religion until it became itself the official faith, and the unifying centre of a disintegrating Empire. It is this complex course of events which we have now to consider.

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## CHAPTER VII

# CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

THE roots of the movement that was destined to become the spiritual dynamic at the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century A.D. were very deeply laid in Palestinian soil. It is, therefore, again to the Fertile Crescent, the link between the Mediterranean world and the East, that we have to turn to discover its beginning in its cradleland, first in Palestine and then in Syria, before, with rapid growth, it spread throughout and eventually beyond the confines of the Empire. Already the Jewish community, within which it arose, was dispersed from Antioch and Jerusalem to Alexandria and Rome—indeed throughout the whole of what was formerly the sphere of influence of Alexander the Great—and it was in its synagogues that Christianity was first proclaimed.

### The Messiahship of Jesus

It was as the long-expected Jewish Messiah who would establish the Kingdom of God on earth that Jesus of Nazareth gathered round him a small band of followers whom he taught and trained, not only to assist him during his own public ministry in Galilee and Judaea, but to carry on after his death the work he had begun. For it soon became apparent that this particular conception of the Messiahship was in direct opposition to that which was commonly held by any of the religious or political parties at the time, be they those of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, or the Zealots (cf. Chap. V, pp. 132 ff.). It is true that Jesus gained a very considerable amount of popular support from his healing mission, and it is recorded that on one occasion at least the people tried to make him a king (Jn. vi. 15). Movements of revolt were frequent in Galilee, and they were often led by men who were regarded as, or represented themselves to be, prophets. Jesus, having

no intention of becoming the leader of a messianic insurrection, withdrew into the mountains and subsequently explained to his disciples the misunderstanding of the Galileans respecting his mission.

According to the tradition that was written down in the form of four Gospels, compiled by various writers from different sources from about A.D. 65 to 100, when he reached manhood (perhaps at about thirty years of age) he became conscious of his Messiahship. After undergoing a profound spiritual experience, which included water baptism in the river Jordan at the hands of his herald, John the Baptist, he retired to the seclusion of "the wilderness of Judaea", presumably the desolate region in which the highlands sink down into the chasm where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea (Mk. i. 9 ff.; Mt. iii. 13 ff.-iv. 1-11; Lk. iii. 21 f., iv. 1-13). He then announced that "the time was fulfilled, and the reign of God had drawn near". Going into the synagogue in his native village of Nazareth he declared that "the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, because he had anointed him to preach good tidings to the poor". He had been sent "to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that were bruised, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". (Lk. iv. 18 f.).

These words were taken from the later section of the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, written at the end of the Exile (Is. lxi. 1-2, lviii. 6), and they connect the Messiah with the Servant of Yahweh, whose mission it was to bring salvation through suffering (cf. Mk. viii. 31-33; Mt. xvi. 21-23). It would seem, then, that St. Luke in putting them into the mouth of Jesus at the very beginning of his ministry suggests that he had already interpreted the office to which he had been consecrated in terms of the Servant of God, rather than in those of a greater David or of the spectacular Son of Man coming in power and glory to deliver the nation from the Roman yoke. He had been sent rather to preach "good news" (i.e. the Gospel) to the poor, the captive, the blind and the spiritually oppressed by inward repressions, rather than to the victims of material force from without. Not that he was oblivious to the other types of Messiahship current in



Judaism, but while he accepted the apocalyptic notions of the new age to be established by the catastrophic appearance of the Messiah, he put his own interpretations on them throughout his career.

No doubt the eschatological sayings attributed to him were very largely apocalyptic predictions widely held in Jewish-Christian circles before and immediately after the fall of Jerusalem. The Acts of the Apostles and the earlier letters of St. Paul are full of this type of imagery connected with the "Parousia", or second advent of Christ (cf. 1 Thess. v. 1 f.; 2 Thess. ii. 2), while the last addition to the New Testament Canon of Scripture, the so-called "Revelation of St. John the Divine", is pure apocalyptic, and it recurs prominently in the "Second Epistle of St. Peter" written in the second century A.D. The "little apocalypse" in the Gospels belongs to the same kind of literature.

The Early Church, in fact, was obsessed by the idea of the imminent return of Christ, and in compiling the record of his sayings while he was on earth it would be quite natural for the writers to incorporate such utterances as had been remembered which referred to the coming of the kingdom in power. These may have been perfectly authentic, but they have been put together in a manner calculated to give an impression by no means identical with what Jesus did actually say, and what he intended to be inferred. Thus, the destruction of the Temple and the tribulation in Judaea, the signs in the heavens, and the appearance of false messiahs and prophets (Mk. xiii.; Mt. xxiv.) as a prelude to the coming of the Son of Man are described quite differently from the earlier account of the events (i.e. the "Day of the Son of Man") in the collection of sayings of Jesus which are commonly called Q (perhaps from the German word *Quelle*, "source"), such as Luke xvii. 22-37, where the advent is represented as happening all of a sudden (cf. Lk. xxi. 34 ff.; 1 Thess. v. 1-10; Mk. xiii. 32-37). There can be little doubt that he did expect the kingdom that he was convinced he had come to establish would be set up immediately. Though this hope was not fulfilled, his followers continued to believe that it must be imminent, and what more appropriate moment could be imagined

than the catastrophe of A.D. 70. It was around this event, therefore, that the "little apocalypse" in the Gospels took shape.

If, in fact, Jesus did apply to himself the office of the Son of Man, it certainly did not suggest to his disciples the idea of a suffering Messiah, nor prevent them from regarding his death when it occurred as the tragic end of all their hopes and aspirations (Lk. xxiv. 18 ff.). Throughout the Gospel narratives they are represented as having been confused and bewildered by his repeated announcements in the second part of his ministry that he must suffer and die in order to rise again from the dead (Mk. viii. 31 ff.; Mt. xvi. 21 ff.; Lk. xvii. 25, xxii. 48, 69, xxiv. 7; cf. xii. 49 f., xiii. 31 ff.). This becomes most apparent after St. Peter's confession of faith in his Messiahship in the neighbourhood of Caesarea Philippi in the tetrarchy of Herod Philip (Mk. viii. 27 f.—x. 52), and in the series of events and utterances which reach their climax in the journey to Jerusalem and its sequel. It was then, we are told, that he "began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again". Henceforth the Cross becomes the goal, for only by setting his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem could the Servant fulfil his destiny and set up the kingdom. When Jesus entered the city on what we now speak of as Palm Sunday, he seems to have boldly impersonated the prophecy of Zechariah by seating himself on a ass amid the acclamation of his disciples and the pilgrims—on their way to the capital for the Passover celebrations—who joined with them in spreading their garments on the road, while others cut down branches from the palm trees and strewed them in the way, as they cried: "Hosanna, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mk. xi. 1-11; Mt. xxi. 1-17; Lk. xix. 28-38; Jn. xii. 12-19; cf. Zech. ix. 9).

Various interpretations have been placed upon this story and the incident, but the vivid character of the account and its general setting favour the historicity of the narrative. Realizing that his teaching about the suffering Messiah had failed, Jesus, it may be conjectured, felt the time

had come to demonstrate his Messiahship. Therefore, in the guise of the long-foretold Davidic King, with lowly pomp he rode forth on the ass to the final stage of his mission, only, unlike the triumphal approach of the prophetic figure, it was to suffer and to die. Actually, however, according to the narratives, there was no Messianic entry, because on reaching the city he proceeded on foot accompanied only by his disciples. The crowd had dispersed, puzzled by this anti-climax. Clearly he was no man of war such as they had expected the Messiah to be, and so he was not the Messiah of their hopes. This perhaps explains, at least in some measure, why those who cried "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday shouted "Crucify" on the following Friday; and even the apostles and his other followers at the crucial moment forsook him and fled, in spite of brave words of steadfastness even unto death.

Nevertheless, once the crucifixion was an accomplished fact and its implications became gradually understood, the significance of the Servant prophecies was recognized in relation to the Messiahship. The death of Christ on Calvary, then, was the one factor above all others which determined for Christianity the conception not only of the Messianic office and its purposes, but also of the whole process of redemption. The functions first attributed to the Davidic King and then invested with apocalyptic glory in the supernatural Son of Man became transfigured with suffering in the person of the defeated yet victorious Saviour of mankind who had applied the figure of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh to himself, not only in his teaching but more spectacularly in his own life laid down in an act of self-offering, humiliation and surrender. Thereby he demonstrated that "greater love" which was henceforth to lie at the very heart of the Gospel his followers proclaimed to Jew and Gentile alike, interpreted in terms of divine forgiveness through Christ.

### **St. Paul**

It was particularly in this conception of the reconciliation of God and man that Christianity parted company with the Judaism in which it emerged. The Day of Atone-

ment was regarded by the rabbis as constituting an annulment of the past under the figure of a new creation, but God was held to forgive fully and freely without any mediation. From the first it would seem the followers of Jesus concentrated attention upon salvation as the reverse side of human sin, requiring a re-creative act of atonement which was at once a deliverance from its bondage and a new birth—a reconciliation and regeneration. This doctrine of redemption was systematized as a theology by St. Paul, who had been born and bred of Jewish stock in the Hellenistic city of Tarsus in Cilicia where his family enjoyed the privilege of, at any rate potential, Roman citizenship. Tarsus was a centre of culture, and if, as is not improbable, Saul, as he was called before his conversion to Christianity, moved in intellectual circles, he could hardly fail to have become familiar with Stoic philosophy and the mystery cults in which, as we saw in the last chapter, personal union with a god who had died and risen again was achieved to secure immortality, even though there is no evidence of his ever having been himself an initiate. With this background, as a young man he went to Jerusalem to be trained in one of the Rabbinical schools as a rigid Pharisee under Gamaliel, the leading teacher of the sect (Acts xxii. 3).

There he became "exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers" (Gal. i. 14), and as a fanatical adherent of Pharisaic orthodoxy he engaged in a vigorous campaign to exterminate the followers of Jesus who had become organized in Palestine as a community known as Nazoraeans before they were later called Christians, first in Antioch (Acts xi. 26). Without departing from the strict observance of their Jewish faith and practice they proclaimed in season and out of season the Messiahship of Christ who had been raised from the dead by God, of which stupendous event they were witnesses (Acts ii. 22 ff., iii. 13 ff.). It was this doctrine of the death and resurrection of Jesus that constituted the central theme of their preaching and brought them into open conflict with the Jewish authorities. To this was added a fresh charge of trying to change the customs that Moses had delivered to Israel and to destroy

the temple, when an ardent convert from the Greek-speaking Jews of the Dispersion, Stephen by name, was added to the Nazoraean faction (Acts vi. 14). His stoning to death was the prelude to a more rigorous persecution of the infant Church which drove its adherents into the neighbouring provinces.

According to the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles, Saul consented to the death of the first martyr, Stephen, and was himself converted to Christianity during his journey to Damascus for the purpose of bringing in bonds to the capital any whom he found of this persuasion on the way (viii. 1, ix. 1-7). In his own account, however, he claimed to have received the Gospel he proclaimed "not after the fashion of men" from the Nazoraeans but directly "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. ii. 11-21). Indeed, he said he was not known by sight to the churches of Judaea, and did not go up to Jerusalem to the apostles but went to Arabia (i. 17). While it is not easy to reconcile the two accounts in their respective details, it is certain that he was an energetic persecutor of the Christian sect (Gal. i. 13; 1 Cor. xv. 9) before he became its zealous preacher in the principal cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, not later than A.D. 60, and established congregations (*ecclesia*) of "believers" wherever he went.

### The Apostolic Church

What exactly were his relations with the original Nazoraean community at Jerusalem has been a matter of discussion for a long time. At first he appears to have engaged in missionary enterprise on his own initiative outside Palestine without consultation or contact with the Jerusalem authorities, and to have made converts among the Gentiles, having worked out his own theology and presentation of the Christian faith, and its implications in relation to Judaism. From Acts xi. it appears that the question already had arisen at Antioch as to whether or not Gentiles should be made Jews by the rite of circumcision before they were baptized into the Church. St. Peter, who was the most outstanding figure among the Twelve Apostles (cf. Acts i. 15, ii. 14, iii. 23, 104, viii. 14-25), is

said to have baptized the uncircumcised Roman centurion, Cornelius, and to have vindicated his action when it was called in question by the "circumcision party" of Judaizers at a council held at Jerusalem to consider the situation under the presidency of James, called the "Lord's brother", who in fact may have been the cousin of Jesus. This, however, did not settle the controversy. Thus, a determined effort was made by the Jewish national party in the Church to enforce the Jewish observance upon the Gentile converts as a condition of baptism. This was strenuously opposed by St. Paul, and it was very largely out of the conflict that ensued that his interpretation of the faith emerged.

In the matter of circumcision St. Peter and St. Paul were in general agreement, and James, the leader of the Jerusalem community, supported the "liberal" position respecting Gentile converts. The quarrel between St. Paul and the Church in the capital (i.e. Jerusalem) arose more over the question of jurisdiction. The Twelve Apostles constituted the original nucleus of the Church and claimed to be the witnesses of the resurrection and to exercise apostolic jurisdiction over the entire movement by virtue of the authority conferred upon it by Christ himself (Mt. xxviii. 18; Jn. xx. 21; Acts i. 21-26; Mk. iii. 14; Lk. iv. 13 ff., 20). At any rate, this is how the position is represented in the Gospels and the Acts, though, as we shall see in a moment, the documentary evidence is in fact a product of the movement as it developed in the last half of the first century A.D. Therefore, it may be based on how things worked out rather than how they actually began. Nevertheless, "The Twelve", as the apostles are called in the literature, do appear to have been the inner circle of the general body of disciples and the closest companions of Jesus during his life, and after his death they naturally became the consolidating centre of the movement among its adherents. Moreover, St. Peter, the "rock man", evidently was the predominant personality until he was eclipsed by St. Paul and his companions, even though it was James, the Lord's brother, who presided over the mother-Church at Jerusalem, and was held in the highest respect in Jewish circles.

St. Paul was in a different category from the rest because he was a later convert, and, on his own admission, had persecuted the cause with the same ardour with which he subsequently propagated and promoted it. But against his opponents who challenged his authority he maintained that he had received his apostolic commission directly from the risen Christ, who had appeared to him, Paul, "as one born out of due time" (1 Cor. xv. 8) who had laboured more abundantly than them all. How deeply laid was the divergence between the Pauline and the Jerusalem sections of the movement, and how far they differed fundamentally in their faith and practice, is very difficult to say, since most of the literature that has been handed down to us comes either directly from Pauline sources, or from those compiled after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when the Pauline tradition was left in possession through the elimination of the Church in the capital.

### The New Testament

Thus, the earliest Christian writings are a series of letters by St. Paul himself, addressed chiefly to local Churches between A.D. 49 or 50 and A.D. 62. The first of these is either the two epistles to the Thessalonians, written from Corinth to the Christians in the important commercial city of Thessalonica, the capital of the province of Macedonia on the Thermaic Gulf, about A.D. 50, at a time when the immediate return of Christ was expected almost hourly; or, alternatively, the Galatian letter. This may have been written a year earlier, but neither the place nor the date of composition can be fixed with any certainty. Galatia proper was a Celtic district in the centre of Asia Minor, but whether or not St. Paul ever visited it is a moot point. It has been suggested, therefore, that the recipients of the letter lived in the Phrygian region in the south of the Roman province of Galatia, through which he is said to have passed on his way to Troas during his second missionary journey (Acts xvi. 6-8). The problem is much too complicated to be discussed here, but although there is no agreement among scholars about the exact provenance or date of the epistle, its authenticity is generally accepted, and it is assigned

to the early period either before or soon after the Council at Jerusalem in A.D. 49 (Acts xv.).

These three letters were followed by 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans about A.D. 55, the genuineness of which is well attested as regards both the external and the internal evidence. Colossians, Philemon and Philippians must have been written from prison if Rome was their place of origin, probably about A.D. 60. Upon this, however, there are a variety of opinions, some, for instance, contending that they came from Ephesus at a rather earlier date. Unlike the document that bears the name of Ephesians, so very different in style, language and doctrine from the Pauline writings, few deny that this group was composed by the Apostle, wherever they may have been written.

While some critics still maintain that Ephesians came from St. Paul himself, although undoubtedly it has points of resemblance to his writings, it would seem more likely to have been the work of someone else in close touch with the Apostle. What is quite certain is that the Epistle to the Hebrews is not Pauline, though it may have been written by an unknown author before the fall of Jerusalem. The so-called "Pastoral Epistles"—the two to Timothy and the one to Titus—may perhaps contain genuine fragments of Pauline correspondence, but they were put together in their present form and circulated when Gnosticism was a serious heresy at the end of the first century A.D., and the organization of the Church had advanced beyond the fluid condition that obtained in St. Paul's lifetime. The same applies to the "General Epistles" of John, Jude and James, and of the latest of all the canonical scriptures of the New Testament, the Second Epistle of Peter, which cannot be dated earlier than the first half of the second century. These were all concerned with correcting errors like Gnosticism and promoting ecclesiastical order and discipline. The First Epistle of Peter can hardly have been composed by the Prince of the Apostles, but it could have been written by an amanuensis such as Silvanus, one of St. Paul's companions, as has been recently suggested. The authorship, however, is very uncertain.

Finally, the Book of Revelation remains an enigma. It



was the latest document to receive a place in the Canon, and has been the happy hunting ground of mystics and fanatics ever since it was assigned the status of scripture, giving rise from time to time to fantastic "prophecies" about the end of the world and current events. Actually it belongs to the apocalyptic literature already discussed (Chap. V, pp. 130 ff.), and it seems to have been compiled at the end of the first century when persecution by the Emperor Domitian was rife and the imperial power appeared to be Satanic. Thus, unlike the rest of the New Testament, where respect for authority is maintained, in this apocalypse the secular rule is fiercely denounced.

Turning now to the Gospels, for the first thirty years after the crucifixion the teaching (*didache*) and preaching (*kerygma*) were delivered orally, though a collection of the sayings of Jesus as they had been remembered by his disciples and transmitted by word of mouth to those whom they instructed, and were in all probability compiled, translated from Aramaic into Greek and arranged (sometimes with explanatory notes) in specific patterns. These were developed until, in the second century, out of the *kerygma* and *didache* emerged the so-called Apostles' Creed. Collections of sayings may have been committed to writing as soon as the Church moved into the Greek-speaking regions, and were moulded and developed by the practical needs of the community.

It was not, however, until about A.D. 65 that John Mark made the first attempt to produce a full-scale "Gospel" as a connected record of the sayings and doings of Jesus. This was followed ten or fifteen years later by a more elaborate compilation on the part of one of St. Paul's companions, St. Luke, describing the origins of Christianity from the birth and infancy of Christ to his resurrection and ascension. In his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, the story was continued in the apostolic period. As his main sources St. Luke had St. Mark's Gospel and the very early collection of source-material commonly called Q, together with his independent information recorded in chapters ix. 51-xviii. 14, and xxii. 14-xxiv., and in the birth and infancy narratives. In the Acts he seems to have used his

own diary (xvi.-xxviii.) in describing events during his journeys with St. Paul, supplemented by the Apostle's speeches and arguments, and what he was able to find out from the Jerusalem Church about the things that happened before he himself came on the scene after St. Paul's conversion.

The Gospel that bears the name of St. Matthew, although printed first in our versions of the new Testament, was produced rather later than the other two, Synoptic Gospels, probably between A.D. 85 and 90. Here again, its author used the Marcan narrative and Q as his chief sources. In fact, about nine-tenths of Mark are reproduced and include the main outline of the story in the same order. In Matthew and Luke Canon Streeter has estimated that there are about 200 verses of common material, presumably from Q, though the Matthaean order in which it is arranged differs from that in the Lucan narrative. In addition, there are some 230 verses peculiar to Matthew alone and these are markedly Jewish in character, concerned largely with the teaching of Christ about the Law and the "Tradition of the Elders" (cf. v. 17-19). Here the approach is contrary to that of St. Paul and of Gentile Christianity, reflecting rather the Jerusalem outlook and practice (cf. x. 5 f., 23).

Although the problem of the composition and sources of the three Synoptic Gospels, Mark, Luke and Matthew, is still under review among New Testament scholars, it is generally agreed that St. Mark is the oldest and basic narrative. Q is more problematical and hypothetical, and quite recently there has been a tendency to question the validity of the Q theory, though some explanation is required to account for the large amount of common non-Markan material in Luke and Matthew. That both of these evangelists had their own independent sources of information is clear, and that they approached the compilation from different angles and with different aims and purposes.

It is when we come to the Fourth Gospel, that bearing the name of St. John, that the greatest perplexities arise. In it there are marked differences regarding the same events, and in presenting the person and teaching of Christ. Whereas in the Synoptic record the ministry of Jesus was almost con-

fined to Galilee until he went to Jerusalem for the last week of his life, in the Fourth Gospel it was in Jerusalem and the surrounding district that most of the incidents and teaching are said to have occurred. Thus, for example, the cleansing of the Temple is placed at the beginning of his ministry rather than on his last Sunday (ii. 14 ff.). There is also a discrepancy, as we shall see, in the dating of the Last Supper and of the Crucifixion. These are a few typical instances of a variation that runs throughout the narrative, but there are also more fundamental differences in language and theology. In short, for both internal and external reasons it becomes evident that the document belongs to the turn of the first century, from A.D. 90 to about 110.

It cannot be later than the beginning of the second century, as the oldest copy of any part of the New Testament yet recovered consists of a few verses of chapters xviii. (31-33, 37-38) of the Fourth Gospel on a fragment of papyrus discovered in Egypt in 1920 and now in the John Rylands Library at Manchester. This is dated at from A.D. 130-150, and a considerable interval must have elapsed before it reached Egypt. On the other hand, it could not have been earlier than A.D. 90 on internal grounds, and this virtually rules out John the son of Zebedee as its author, as tradition has alleged. All kinds of conjectures have been made about possible writers, the most probable being that it was the work of a Palestinian Jew named John the Elder who lived in Ephesus at the end of the first century, and who became confused with John the Apostle by early Christian writers like Irenaeus. As a lad he may have known Jesus in Jerusalem, and some scholars think he may have been associated with the son of Zebedee, from whom he derived some of the memoirs which he recorded.

### The Eucharist

Anyway, the Fourth Gospel was written to interpret Christianity to the Graeco-Roman world at a critical juncture in the history of the Church. By the end of the first century it had broken away from *its* Jewish moorings and become launched on the turbulent seas of the Empire.

By this time it had long ceased to be a Jewish Nazoraean community and become organized as a Church, catholic in its universal outlook and dimensions, with its own theology, literature, administration, apostolic ministry and worship centred in the distinctive Christian rite instituted by Jesus himself on the same night in which he was betrayed, when he foregathered with his apostles in an upper room in Jerusalem, perhaps in the house of John Mark, for a last common meal with them. Whether or not it coincided with the Jewish Passover is by no means clear. In the Synoptic Gospels the "Last Supper" is represented as having been actually a Paschal meal (Mk. xiv. 12 ff.; Mt. xxvi. 17 ff.; Lk. xxii. 7 ff.), whereas the Fourth Gospel implies that it took place at a ritual gathering, or Kiddûsh, on the previous evening (Jn. xix. 14), since the trial of Jesus is said to have occurred on the evening of the Preparation (i.e. the day before the Passover). This seems more likely, as both the priests and the people would have been occupied with their religious duties during the feast.

But whatever may have been its precise nature and occasion, while they were assembled Jesus as the host took bread, gave thanks over it, broke it and distributed it among the apostles with the words which identified it with his own body about to be broken on the Cross. He also took a cup of wine and water (or possibly two cups, as is suggested in the variant reading in Luke xxii. 19 ff.), and performed the same actions, saying, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many" (Mk. xiv. 24), to which St. Paul, in the earliest account of the rite in 1 Cor. xi. 23-26, adds "this do in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death until he come".

Thus, it would appear very probable that Jesus, realizing that the blow might fall at any moment, assembled his apostles on the Thursday evening to enact under the very shadow of the Passover, and of his own Passion, a dramatic symbolization of the events which he realized were about to take place, and which apparently it was his intention should be commemorated in this manner after his death. The textual evidence is confused, but what is not in doubt

is that his followers, when their Master had passed from their midst, assembled together on the first day of the week (being that on which they maintained he had risen from the dead) to re-enact the last solemn gathering they had had with him on the tragic night (which is now called Maundy Thursday), (Acts ii. 42, 46; xx. 7), and the similar meals at which they declared he had appeared to them after his resurrection (cf. Lk. xxiv. 30).

This practice became the central act of Christian worship in the apostolic Church, and as it came to be interpreted as the perpetual memorial before God of the death of Christ, it developed a mystery theology and a sacred ministry which were the consolidating dynamic in the New Israel, occupying much the same position as that of the Temple worship and its priesthood in Judaism. It was, in fact, from the Old Testament rather than the pagan mysteries that St. Paul in his Eucharistic discourses took most of his illustrations, and the Christian liturgy developed at first along the lines of the synagogue pattern, opening with readings of scripture and prayers and concluding with the dismissal of those who were preparing for baptism (catechumens), before the most solemn part of the service began, called the *Missa fidelium*, or Mass of the Faithful. This opened with the placing of the bread and wine on the altar at the offertory, leading up to their consecration by the celebrant, the giving of the kiss of peace, the Communion of the clergy and people, followed by the ablutions of the vessels and the dismissal of the congregation by the deacons with the words, "*Ite missa est*", a formula that led to the Eucharist, or "giving of thanks", being known as "the Mass".

### The Sacred Ministry

When the Agape, or common meal, was separated from the Eucharist, the synagogue type of service was confined to the preliminary section, the distinctly Christian act of worship being concentrated upon the Eucharistic oblation and the sacramental Communion in the body and blood of Christ. At first it was the bishops, occupying the position vacated by the apostles, who were the celebrants, assisted

by the presbyters (*sacerdos*). But as the faith spread and local Churches were placed under the care of presbyters, they were given the right to consecrate the Elements as the deputies of the bishops under whom they served. The exercise of episcopal functions remained with the bishops, very much as in Ancient Egypt the pharaoh was in theory the officiant in all the temples but for practical purposes he delegated his ministrations to the royal priesthoods.

### The Papacy

In Western Christendom the organization was more and more centralized in the capital, and when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire in the fourth century the deference paid to the bishop of Rome was still further enhanced. In each province the bishop of the chief city was called the "Metropolitan", and he was given authority over the other bishops in the area, while the bishops of Rome, Constantinople (the new capital erected on the Bosphorus by Constantine in A.D. 330 and named after him), Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem were entitled "Patriarchs" in the ninth century, to signify their superior authority to that of the Metropolitans. Of these Patriarchs the occupants of the Holy See of Rome claimed absolute supremacy and the exercise of universal jurisdiction over the whole Church as the successor of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, upon whom, in due course, it was maintained Christ had conferred primacy at Caesarea Philippi (Mt. xvi. 17-19). The position of St. Peter in the apostolic Church is exceedingly difficult to determine,<sup>1</sup> but once the Petrine supremacy was admitted in the West, the Papacy was firmly established with all that this has involved for the history of Christianity.

Located in the ancient capital of the Empire, and claiming to have in its possession the mortal remains of the two most outstanding figures, St. Peter and St. Paul, in an age when relics were thought to bestow peculiar sanctity on those who housed them, the Church of Rome and its bishop occupied a unique position in Christendom. In

<sup>1</sup> I have recently reviewed the evidence, giving references to the literature, in my *Nature and Function of Priesthood* (1955), pp. 262 ff.

the East, however, while the prestige, and in some measure the primacy of the Papacy over the West were conceded, the independence of the Eastern provinces in matters of faith and jurisdiction was maintained. During the prolonged controversy that attended the attempt to formulate the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Christianity in terms of a Creed at the Council of Nicaea in 325, and subsequently at Constantinople in 381, a dispute between East and West became acute on a complicated theological issue concerning the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Century after century the conflict dragged on and gathered momentum until, in 867, the Patriarch of Constantinople condemned the Pope for failing to correct what the East regarded as heresy. It was not, however, until 1054 that a final and complete schism between East and West became absolute, when the Pope excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople. This constituted the first official division in the unity of Christendom.

In the West the Papacy remained the unifying centre, claiming to exercise supreme authority as Vicars of Christ over the whole Church. This eventually found expression in temporal sovereignty with the earthly State having its own duties and functions but virtually subordinate to the spiritual authority. Such an organization could hardly fail to produce recurrent contests between Popes and Emperors, Church and State, which at last came to a head in the sixteenth century, when the great medieval Christian civilization, which reached its climax in the magnificent achievements of the thirteenth century, had run its course. First came a disastrous schism within the Papacy with rival popes at Rome and Avignon between 1378 and 1417 which weakened immeasurably papal power, not least in England and France. This was followed by the Revival of Learning, known as the Renaissance, in the fifteenth century, after Constantinople fell to the Muslims in 1453. This marks the beginning of the movement towards individualism and the bid for freedom from ecclesiastical control. The popes, however, themselves became zealous patrons of the arts and of the revived classical culture,

though little was done to correct the abuses that were crying for reform in the Church.

### The Reformation

To this end voices were raised in England and Bohemia by Wyclif and John Huss, but it was not until the next century that a stand was taken by Martin Luther, in Germany in 1517, condemning in the first instance the sale of indulgences and what seemed to him to be "the pride, pomp and worldliness of the Papacy". He then proceeded to a re-statement of Christian doctrine and practice based on his conception of "justification by faith" in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans (cf. i. 17, v. 20 f., vi. 5, xi. 15). From Germany the revolt spread rapidly to Central Europe, where it assumed a more radical form under the influence of John Calvin (1509-1564) at Geneva and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) in Zurich. On the principle of "scripture only" as the basis of doctrine and discipline, the Zwinglian reform began in 1542, with the result that a complete break was made with Catholic faith and practice. The Eucharist was represented as a sign, the words of Jesus at its institution, "This is my body", being interpreted as "this signifies my body", a contention very different from Luther's theory of "consubstantiation" (i.e. that the presence of Christ was along with the elements of bread and wine in an "indefinable manner").

Calvin sided with Zwingli against Luther's doctrine of the Real Presence, except that he maintained that the communicant did partake in faith of the real body and blood of Christ without any change in the elements. While he accepted the doctrine of justification by faith in respect of believers, his insistence on the absolute sovereignty of God and the innate corruption of human nature led him to adopt the doctrine of predestination of the elect to salvation and the condemnation of the rest of mankind to perdition as an eternal divine decree. Again, unlike Luther, who regarded the sole essential function of the Church as that of preaching Christ through Word and Sacrament, Calvin recognized the need of a positive ecclesiastical polity. Thus, although many of the cardinal doctrines of the Catholic



creeds were retained by the continental Reformers, their basic principle of the private interpretation of scripture, generally regarded as verbally inspired in the manner still upheld by those who today are commonly known as Fundamentalists, led to a variety of conflicting beliefs and schisms which lay at the root of the subsequent divided state of Western Christendom after the breach in the sixteenth century.

It was out of this situation that the numerous Protestant denominations arose. In Scotland, for instance, Presbyterianism was organized by John Knox (*c.* 1515-1572) as a system of Church government and doctrine on the Calvinist principle. From the same Genevan source sprang Congregationalism and Independency in England, to which the fellowship of believers called Baptists were closely allied. In the seventeenth century the Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers, was instituted by George Fox (1624-1691) as a non-sectarian, non-sacramental movement based on spiritual experience as the Inner Light. A more radical departure from traditional Christianity occurred in Unitarianism, where the doctrine of the Trinity was abandoned in favour of the belief in the single personality of God, carrying with it a denial of the divinity of Christ in the sense in which the Incarnation has been understood in orthodox Christianity.

By way of reaction to Calvinism, a Dutch theologian, Arminius (1560-1609), maintained against predestination that forgiveness and eternal life are open to all men through faith in Christ, and it was on this interpretation of evangelical Christianity that John Wesley and his followers, who were called Methodists, based the crusade they launched in England in the eighteenth century. Rationalistic Deism and Unitarianism, and the intellectual scepticism of the Established Church, made no more appeal to the masses in the eighteenth century at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution than did the Homeric Olympian tradition in ancient Greece, or the State cult in Imperial Rome. As in the Graeco-Roman world, men turned to the mysteries for the satisfaction of their spiritual needs (*cf.* Chap. VI, pp. 147 ff.), so a wave of remarkable enthusiasm spread

over England when the Methodists went all over the country carrying their message of salvation, and calling men to repentance and conversion. The Church, however, failed to rise to the occasion, and although Wesley originally was an Anglican priest and his preachers were either clergymen or laymen of the Church of England, the movement was driven into "descent" (unlike that of the Franciscans in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), and rapidly broke up into a number of sects and schisms. In 1932 these were reunited to form the Methodist Church as it now exists in the British Commonwealth of Nations, America and elsewhere.

In respect of the historic Church in England, the Reformation took a different turn from its continental counterpart, because it began as a political issue arising out of the quarrel between Henry VIII and the Papacy on the question of his marriage with Catherine of Aragon; a union the Pope refused to annul. When this led to a breach with Rome after 1532, at first there was very little change in doctrine and practice, apart from the all-important question of the jurisdiction of the Holy See. But although Henry had violently opposed Luther, and thereby acquired the title of "defender of the faith", still retained by his successors, once the English Church had become autonomous, Lutheran, and later Calvinist, influences could not be withstood, particularly as Henry was succeeded by a delicate minor during whose short reign a strongly Protestant administration was maintained. Then came the ill-omened interlude of Mary Tudor, with a return to the papal allegiance, which led to the gallant attempt of Elizabeth in 1559 to arrive at a comprehensive "settlement" of the complex situation by making the Church in England all-embracing. But this proved impossible to attain, as neither the Roman Catholics on the one side, nor the Puritans on the other, were prepared to acquiesce in what to them seemed to be merely a political compromise, neither genuinely Catholic nor properly Protestant.

But whatever may have been its defects, deficiencies and anomalies, in effect it retained the ancient ecclesiastical structure in respect of the apostolic ministry of bishops,

priests and deacons, the universal creeds of Christendom in which the historic faith had been enshrined since the fourth century, the two major sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, together with Confirmation and the optional use of the sacrament of penance for those who desired to make their confessions and receive absolution from a priest, combined with a freer use of scripture in public worship and the substitution of English for Latin in the Liturgy and the offices. Moreover, considerable latitude in doctrinal interpretation and ritual procedure was permitted. If it failed to accomplish its original aim in embracing all the divergent elements in a single Establishment, it laid the foundations of the Anglican Communion as it now exists, and which has always claimed to be both Catholic and Reformed.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, after a period of lethargy, during which incidentally such outstanding figures as the philosopher George Berkeley and Joseph Butler adorned the episcopate, the Evangelical Revival carried on the work of Wesley within the framework of the national Church and gave a fresh impetus to missionary enterprise. Among its achievements was the abolition of the slave trade, through the initiative of William Wilberforce, and a renewed zeal in pastoral work. At Oxford, under the leadership of a group of Anglican dons centred at Oriel, who included John Keble, John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey, and who became known as Tractarians, a movement was launched, as a result of Keble's Assize sermon in 1833, which emphasized the Catholic conception of the Church and the sacraments. As its influence spread rapidly to the parishes, this aspect of the Anglican tradition found expression in faith and practice everywhere. Meanwhile F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley concentrated attention on the social implications of Christianity, while the rise of critical scholarship in the second half of the century had a profound effect upon theological thought, under the influence of men like S. R. Driver, F. C. Burkitt, Charles Gore and those he gathered round him in the production of a series of studies on the Incarnation published in 1889 under the title of *Lux*

*Mundi*. These, among other pioneers, laid the foundations of an apologetic based on sound learning which is now established.

### The Counter-Reformation

The circumstances that produced the breach in Christendom in the sixteenth century were not without their effects on Roman Catholicism, as well as on those who broke away from the papal jurisdiction. Thus, a Counter-Reformation, or Roman Catholic Revival, made a determined attempt to remedy the abuses that had been largely responsible for Luther's revolt, and to reaffirm the traditional faith in the changed conditions of the times. In 1545 a Council assembled at Trent in northern Italy, and for eighteen years devoted itself to the definition of its cardinal doctrines in terms which have remained its official dogmatic basis ever since. As the Benedictine monasteries and the Friars had been the stabilizing force in the medieval Church, so at this critical juncture new Religious Orders (e.g. the Jesuits, Capuchins, Oratorians, etc.) were established to make for greater efficiency in carrying out its mission in the world, centred in the absolute supremacy of the Holy See. This was coupled with the reorganization of the Inquisition for the suppression of heresy, then so rampant as a result of the upheaval. The emphasis on papal supremacy and centralization eventually found expression in 1854 in the promulgation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, conceived, as it was affirmed, free from original sin, followed in 1870 at the Vatican Council by the declaration of papal infallibility.

This decree proclaimed that the Roman pontiff, when speaking *ex cathedra* as pastor and teacher of all Christians, is possessed of that infallibility with which Christ willed his Church to be endowed. Therefore, in faith and morals such utterances are without error. Thus, in 1950 Pope Pius XII on November 1st solemnly promulgated the doctrine of the Corporal Assumption of our Lady as a dogma binding upon the faithful, so that all Roman Catholics are now obliged to believe, as unquestionably the majority already held, that the body of the Virgin was preserved from cor-

ruption at her death and was translated, or "assumed", into heaven to be united to her soul. This, it is maintained, is a truth revealed by God and founded upon Scripture and Tradition, and so is *de fide* ("of faith").

### Muhammad and the Qur'an

Whether it be in an infallible Papacy or Church, as in Catholicism, or in an infallible Bible, as in Protestantism, the tendency in revealed religions everywhere always has been to seek an absolute external authority and oracular guarantee of truth and certitude. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in Islam, which is primarily and essentially the religion of a sacred book, the Holy Qur'an, regarded as a divine message to the Prophet Muhammad dictated by God to him in Arabic from a "preserved tablet" in heaven (Qur'an, XCVI. 1-5), very much as an American evangelist quite recently has described the writers of the Jewish-Christian scriptures as the scribes of the Deity. Islam, in fact, might be counted almost a Christian "heresy" apart from this new direct revelation, supplementing and completing that vouchsafed through Christ and the Hebrew prophets, since the Founder got most of his material from late forms of Judaism and Christianity, often curiously distorted and garbled.

Born in Mecca in Arabia about the year A.D. 570 in a well-established but poor family of the Quraysh tribe, Muhammad was virtually an orphan, as his father appears to have died before his birth and his mother demised while he was very young. He was brought up by his grandfather and his uncle and, before becoming a camel-driver trading with Damascus, he was a shepherd. At the age of twenty-five he married the wealthy widow, Khadijah, who had employed him, and so gained a recognized status in Meccan society. Already he had encountered degenerate forms of Judaism and Christianity during his caravan journeyings to Aleppo and Damascus, and he is said to have been influenced by a monotheist named Zayd son of 'Amr, and to have had psychic experiences which he attributed to supernatural visitations.

It was not, however, until he was forty years of age that

he retired to a cave in mount Hira near Mecca, where he was in the habit of spending periods in meditation, and there, as he affirmed, after having been visited by an angel Gabriel in a dream, he was commanded "to recite in the name of the Lord who had created man out of a clot of blood" the message eventually recorded in the Qur'an. Returning to Mecca after this experience, he consulted with his wife and trusted friends who confirmed him in the belief that he had been called to become the prophet of his people, and to recall them from the animistic and polytheistic worship of astral gods, fertility goddesses, demons, jinn, springs, wells and sacred stones, which characterized the religion of pre-Islamic Arabia. Indeed, Muhammad at first thought he was possessed by a jinn when he began to receive his revelations, and he was so regarded by the Meccans when he disclosed his visions to them. He himself, however, became convinced that he was called to be the mouthpiece and prophet of Allah, the name for God derived from the Arabian *Ilah* combined with the definite article *al*. Already in Mecca Allah probably was known as a remote High God, or Supreme Being, of the Quraysh tribe, very much as Yahweh in a similar capacity was familiar to the desert tribes before the time of Moses (cf. Chap. II, pp. 53 f.). Otherwise the Qur'an would have been unintelligible to the Meccans.

After the first apparition of Gabriel the visions at the cave ceased for several months, and until they were resumed Muhammad passed through a period of intense depression. He was, in fact, sustained only by his wife's support and faith in his mission. Then came fresh messages and the command to recite publicly what he had been taught. At first, however, the revelations were merely ridiculed in Mecca, and then, as the denunciations of the worship of the traditional gods and spirits continued, the Quraysh tribe became seriously disturbed. As organized opposition increased Muhammad was forced to retire to the territory of his uncle, Abu Talib, for protection, together with his wife, his adopted son, Zayd, his cousin, Ali, and his kinsman, Abu Bakr, who afterwards became his father-in-law and his successor as the chief caliph. For two years

they lived precariously, collecting around them a number of people of humble origin, rather like David at the cave of Adullam.

### **The Theocracy at Medina**

After the death of Khadijah and Abu Talib, Muhammad, having made an abortive attempt to establish himself at Ta'if, sixty miles to the east of Mecca, returned to the city, where he married another widow, Sauda. He then immediately contracted a polygamous union with Ayesha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, to whom he added subsequently seven other wives. At the pilgrimage festival he encountered six men from the town of Yathrib, 300 miles to the north, and henceforth to be known as Medina, "the city of the Prophet". Entering into an alliance with them in 622, he escaped from Mecca with Abu Bakr and made his way to Yathrib, where he established the theocratic rule of Allah, with himself as its supreme ruler and prophet. These pretensions were ridiculed and strongly opposed by the Jews in the city, to his great disappointment and bitter resentment. As a result, as soon as he was able to erect a mosque for the practice of the cultus he instituted, he decreed that the prayers and prostrations should be made facing Mecca instead of towards Jerusalem as heretofore. This custom has remained symbolic of the hostility between Islam and Judaism which has prevailed ever since, and which at the present moment is one of the most potent causes of disruption in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, Muhammad always maintained that his revelation confirmed that recorded in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, though, as the Qur'an shows, his knowledge of their contents was very confused and derived from late apocryphal sources and Rabbinic Midrash. Talmudic tales were incorporated, like that of Satan's refusal to worship Adam, or of a raven scratching on the ground to show Cain how to dispose of the body of Abel (V. 30-35). Abraham, as the alleged founder of Islam through Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs (II, 122 ff.), is said to have been cast into a fire because he refused to worship idols (XXXVII. 95, XXI. 68-70) on the strength of

the fictitious Jewish Targum about Abraham. That he was accredited with building the cube-shaped central shrine at Mecca called the Ka'ba, of which the Quraysh tribe were the guardians and in which stood the black stone alleged to have fallen from heaven in the time of Adam, is not surprising in view of its sanctity. It had been a place of pilgrimage long before the time of Muhammad, and it readily came to be associated with the traditional founder of Islam, long before the days of the Prophet, when, as it was alleged, the first Muslim, Abraham, rebuilt it and installed the black stone in it. Nearby was Hagar's well, where it was supposed the waters had welled up to save the life of Ishmael (II. 148 ff.). Thus, the central sanctuary was surrounded with a halo of Hebrew legend.

As soon as he could rally his forces, the Prophet determined to capture Mecca and the Ka'ba at all costs. First, however, he had to convince the Medinans that, notwithstanding the Arab horror of slaying a kinsman, it was their sacred duty to exterminate idolatry at any cost (II. 214, VIII. 15 ff.). When this was agreed, with three hundred Muslims he set out from Medina and defeated nine hundred Meccans at the battle of Badr. The following year the position was reversed at Uhud, near Medina, but when a grand assault on the City of the Prophet was made in 627 it was frustrated by a ditch and earthworks constructed as a defensive device on the Persian model. It now became clear that Muhammad was impregnable in his own domain, and having eliminated the Jewish tribes in the city with the aid of mass executions and the selling of women and children into slavery, he then set out for Mecca on a pilgrimage with a strong contingent and forced the conclusion of a treaty for ten years. This strategic victory brought Meccan resistance to an end and virtually made him master of Arabia before his death in Medina in 632, perhaps partly as a result of poisoning by a Jewess to avenge the ruthless persecution her people had suffered at his hands.

### The Caliphate

The demise of the Prophet raised the problem of the succession. The office was immediately assumed by Abu Bakr,



as the first caliph, being the father-in-law of Muhammad (whose daughter Ayesha, incidentally, was the prophet's favourite wife) and on many occasions his deputy. At his death at the end of a year Omar, the father of yet another of his wives, Hatsa, was elected in 634. During his rule as "the commander of the faithful", Islam was propagated by holy wars, in the course of which Damascus, Jerusalem, Caesarea and the whole of Syria capitulated, northern Mesopotamia, Egypt, Cyrene and Tripoli were added to the empire, and in Iraq the long line of Sassanian kings was brought to an end. On the assassination of Omar by a Persian slave in 644, another son-in-law of Muhammad, Othman, was chosen, only to suffer the same fate as his predecessor, meeting his death at the hands of dissatisfied Muslims at Medina in 656.

The way was now open for Ali, Muhammad's first convert and the husband of his daughter Fatima, to assume office, but not without the opposition of other aspirants, together with that of Ayesha. The faction continued until he was murdered in 661, and the section of the Quraysh tribe known as Omayyads seized power and transferred the centre of government to Damascus. Under their rule the Empire was extended in North Africa, Constantinople was besieged, Carthage was captured in 698, and the invasion of Spain was begun in 711. As they moved on into France they threatened to engulf the Mediterranean until, at the battle of Tours, Charles Martel in 732, just a hundred years after the death of Muhammad, stemmed the tide. Driven back to the Iberian peninsula by the Frankish army, they established themselves as the Muslim Moorish kingdom. There they were able to survive when in 750 the Omayyads were overthrown by their rival faction, the Abbasids, who moved the capital to Baghdad and continued the domination of Islamic civilization until it broke up into separate states in the thirteenth century.

While Islam was propagated by a succession of wars of conquest, nevertheless, wherever it has spread it has produced a consolidated culture with a simple creed fervently believed and an equally simple cult punctiliously practised, together with a common way of life subject to a common

law and having a common sacred language (Arabic) in which the Qur'an is recited everywhere. As a result, Islam, with its 250 million adherents, has extended from its Arabian cradleland through Persia and India to the Far East, and westwards through Africa to the Atlantic coast, and left its mark on European history, notably in Spain and the Balkans. So linked up with every vital aspect of human life has it become that it has transcended all other allegiances, and over this vast area it has produced a homogeneous society. Scholars in Alexandria, caravan attendants in Morocco, tradesmen in Syria and farmers in Java, to say nothing of the 95 million Muslims in the sub-continent of India, regulate their lives and behaviour in accordance with the religious, social and political norm provided by the Qur'an and the Traditions derived from these sacred scriptures. This is the spiritual dynamic that gives the individual an independent standard by which to criticize the laws of a State and the actions of its rulers, and exercises a profound cultural influence in giving coherence to this vast civilization, transcending the barriers of race, language and locality.

### The "Five Pillars" of Islam

It is true that sectarianism has been rife, as in most other religions based on a prophetic tradition. Muhammad, indeed, is alleged to have said that "diversity of opinion among my people is a mercy of God", and to have predicted that his followers "would split up into seventy-three sects as the children of Israel were divided into seventy-two sects". But the schisms arose largely from disputes about the succession to the caliphates, though there have been also differences in religious belief and practice. All Muslims, however, are agreed that "there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the apostle of God". This fundamental confession of faith is proclaimed from the slender tower, or minaret, attached to the larger mosques which the *muezzin* mounts five times every day to announce from a gallery (in the absence of a minaret, from the roof) in long-drawn-out tones in all directions, as he cries, "Allah is great. I testify that there is no God but Allah. I testify

that Muhammad is God's Apostle. Come to pray, come to security. God is most great", adding, at the first call at dawn, "prayer is better than sleep".

At sunrise, at noon, in the early afternoon, at sunset and at the fall of darkness, wherever they may be—on the highway, in the fields, on the desert, or in towns—all Muslims are under a solemn obligation to engage in the prescribed prayers and recitation of the Qur'an. Unrolling their prayer mats, bowing towards Mecca, they say at least the *Fatihah*, or opening chapter of the Qur'an, as an act of praise to God the Compassionate and Merciful, to whom alone is worship due, and to whom cry is made for help and guidance on the straight path. When circumstances permit, adult males are expected to fulfil this obligation in a mosque (Fig. 18), first making a preliminary ablution of the hands, mouth, face, nostrils, neck and feet at the fountain in the courtyard. Removing their shoes in the entrance, they face the semi-circular recess (*mihrab*) orientated in the direction of Mecca, and say the *Fatihah* with the prescribed prostrations and actions, a few other verses of the Qur'an, and completing the devotion with the recital of the creed ("There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle of God"). To ensure uniformity in the act of worship, a leader, called the *imam*, faces the congregation and directs the words said and the movements performed. On Fridays, the weekly holy day corresponding to the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday, except that it is not observed as a rest day, in addition to the prayers the *imam* usually preaches at noon or sunset. Women are supposed to pray at home and seldom, if ever, go to the mosque. For males, attendance is obligatory on Fridays. This confession of faith and corporate prayer constitute, in fact, the first two of the so-called "Five Pillars", or duties, binding on the believer. The three others are almsgiving, fasting and going on pilgrimage to Mecca.

In the absence of a cultus with the usual adjuncts of worship—e.g. an altar, sanctuary, shrines, sacred objects—the mosque, as the word suggests, is "a place of prostration", where corporate prayer and praise are held five times daily. This spiritual routine has developed a strong

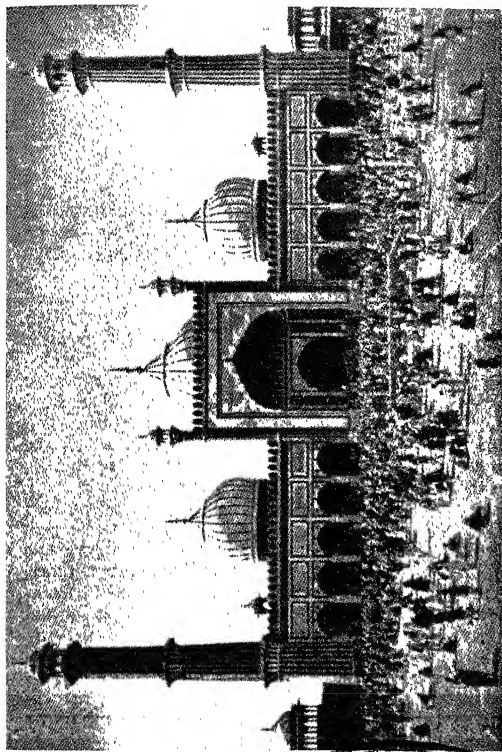


FIG. 18.—Jumja Masjid Mosque at Delhi.

sense of corporate religious life which has been a powerful influence in the consolidation of Islam. To neglect the exercise is to become an unbeliever, for the first service Allah demands of the faithful is to make confession of faith in him and to praise his holy name.

Next to this comes the duty of almsgiving in the form of a yearly tax paid on movable property, such as cattle, gold, silver or goods, amounting usually to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. or 10 per cent. on farm crops. It was originally devoted to the poor and needy, the redemption of slaves, and to enable debtors to meet their liabilities. Now it is a voluntary contribution towards missionary propaganda and the upkeep of the mosques, and, when need requires, the sustenance of the sick and aged.

The fourth "Pillar", or duty, is fasting, and this is concentrated mainly on the strict observance of Ramadan during the ninth month, in which the Qur'an was revealed. As the Muslim calendar follows a lunar sequence, its occurrence varies over a period of years, and since the observance involves complete abstinence from food, drink and smoking from sunrise to sunset, it may impose a heavy strain when it falls in summer in countries like India. Children, the aged, expectant mothers, the sick and travellers are exempt, but otherwise it is binding on all Muslims, and the sick are expected to keep it at some other time on recovery from their illness.

The last of the duties is that of making a pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca, walking round the Ka'ba seven times, running between two small hills, Safa and Marwa, commemorating Hagar's search for water to sustain Ishmael, and visiting the hill of Arafat twelve miles away. On the way back to Mecca, sheep and camels are sacrificed at Mina and the devil is ceremonially stoned "in the name of God". To complete the pilgrimage, which all Muslims are expected to make at least once in a lifetime, the tomb of the Prophet at Medina should be visited.

### Eschatology

In its doctrine of the "last things" Islam has elaborated Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian eschatology. At death

the soul of the elect goes to a paradise fashioned on an earthly model to enjoy its delights, which include feasting, music and the enjoyment of its black-eyed daughters, as well as beholding the face of God by day and night. Against this is set hell, with its seven divisions assigned respectively to unfaithful Muslims, Jews, Christians, Sabaeans, Magi, idolaters and hypocrites as an abode of eternal punishment. Human destiny is predestined and written down on the eternal tablets of Faith. Prophets and martyrs go straight to paradise, and so miss the Day of Judgment when the trumpet is thrice sounded by the archangel Israfil. The signs preceding this event are taken from the Jewish Talmud and Midrash, and the bridge to be crossed as narrow as the edge of a razor, comes from Zoroastrianism (cf. Chap. V, pp. 119 f.). The good and evil deeds done on earth are weighed in the balance by the archangel, and the record is given into the right hand of the justified and tied on the back of the condemned. So equipped, they proceed to their respective hereafters by way of the bridge. Those destined for paradise cross safely, while those predestined to hell fall into the pit beneath. Jesus, accompanied by the Imam called Mahdi and the beast of the earth, introduces Islam as the world religion, and all who have acknowledged the faith of the Prophet will ultimately be delivered from hell and enjoy the bliss of paradise.

### **The Tradition**

There can be no doubt that "The Five Pillars" of the faith, the prescribed code of conduct in secular affairs, the "holy war" against unbelievers and this eschatology have consolidated Islam both as an all-embracing religion and as a stable civilization spread throughout the greater part of the world. As its name suggests, Islam is "submission" to the sovereign will of Allah, and the way of salvation for Muslims, "those who submit", is obedience to his inscrutable will as revealed in the Qur'an through Muhammad. But the Qur'an soon proved to be inadequate to meet the growing needs of an ever-widening movement. If Muhammad was the supreme source of revelation his guidance must

be sought as and when required, and after his death a vast collection of his sayings on all manner of topics was recorded and classified as *hadith*, or traditions. These were made the basis of the prescribed customs, or *sunna*, which Muslims were constrained to observe. Tradition, however, assembled in this way became so enormous that action had to be taken to keep it within bounds, and to subject it to careful scrutiny. Thus, only those alleged sayings of the Prophet were admitted to be genuine that could be shown to have been handed on through his companions by a chain of attestors, the veracity of each of whom could be established.

These traditions were written down in law books, the earliest of which is the *Muwatta* of Malik ibn Anas (A.D. 795), but it was not until the ninth century that a duly authenticated version was compiled by a Persian lawyer, al Bukhari, containing some 3,000 *hadith* said to be genuine out of the 600,000 examined. This collection (*sahih*) is generally given an authority second only to that of the Qur'an, while that of al Muslim (875) is also held in very high esteem. In due course other books were added, showing how Islam adapted itself to changing conditions and environments without in theory departing from the traditional faith. On the principle of a general consensus of opinion (*ijma*) based on the alleged saying of Muhammad that "my people will never agree in an error", it has been possible for the lawyers to maintain four orthodox schools of jurisprudence, and to stigmatize as heretical certain reforming movements.

### The Sects

The most pronounced deviation from Sunnite orthodoxy arose, however, out of the conflict between those who remained faithful to Ali and became known as Shi'a, "the party of Ali", and those who maintained the legitimacy of the three preceding Caliphates. This raised a religious issue, as the Shi'a rejected the principle of the consensus of opinion of the community and put in its place a doctrine that in every age an infallible Iman was chosen by God to be head of the State, either directly or through his prede-

cessor. In him alone dwells the "light" of Muhammad, and therefore he is the interpreter of the Qur'an and the guardian of the Law. This infallible succession through Ali to a living exponent of the words and will of Allah, often regarded as virtually co-equal with the Prophet, was maintained in a line of Twelve Imams, the last of whom disappeared mysteriously in 878. He is thought by one of the largest sections of the sect, predominant as the State religion of Persia since 1502, to be still living in secret as the Mahdi who at "the end of the ages" will reappear to establish his rule in righteousness. While the Shi'a differ among themselves about the number and identity of the Imams, the "messianic hope" is universally held, and sometimes it has been combined with the belief that Ali and the Imams were divine incarnations. One of the branches, tracing its descent from the Seventh Imam, Isma'il, became notorious in the Middle Ages as "Assassins", a Frankish corruption of hashish, the name of an intoxicating herb from which a beverage was made and drunk before they set out on murderous campaigns. In the thirteenth century they were suppressed by the Mongols, but the Isma'ili sect is not essentially warlike, as is shown by the fact that now the Aga Khan is its hereditary spiritual head.

Another liberal movement was the Mu'tazilite school of "seceders", which held that the Qur'an was written in Arabic and contained the speech of men. Therefore, it belonged to this world and so was created, and was not, as the Sunni contended, the eternal uncreated Word of God. As it had a human element, it was not beyond reverent criticism and verification. Again, because God is just and righteous he cannot be the author of evil, or predestine sinners to damnation by decreeing their evil deeds before they are actually committed. Man is responsible for his actions and will be judged accordingly. Reason alone affords guidance in a knowledge of God, and his ways are not so past finding out that man is called to blind acceptance of and resignation to everything alleged to be his will. The impact of Greek thought on the Arab world sooner or later was bound to raise the problem of the relation of reason to revelation, and the Mu'tazilites might have



established themselves if they had not abused their power under the caliph Ma'mun in 833, when they obtained official recognition in the State religion. The conservative section of the Sunnites, however, speedily regained ascendancy and found an important ally in a former Mu'tazilite theologian, Ashari, who endeavoured to interpret the Sunna in rationalistic terms in which he made God into a kind of Absolute from whom the Qur'an and the *hadith* proceeded as ideas from the mind of the Eternal recited on earth. For creating and damning the infidel, Allah, it was said, had his own reasons beyond human understanding.

### Mysticism

Against these juristic and rationalistic developments, and in reaction against the widespread luxury of the Caliphates, an ascetic movement arose which under Neoplatonic, oriental and Christian influences assumed a mystical guise, in spite of the Prophet's discouragement of this type of religious practice as out of keeping with a faith propagated with the sword. Deriving its name of *sufi* from the Arabic *suf*, "wool", because they wore a coarse woollen garment, these ascetics in their search for spiritual perfection worked out a technique for attaining mystic knowledge of God which included long vigils, intensive meditation, and the practice of celibacy. By the twelfth century monastic Orders had been established in which the ecstatic state was produced by muscular movements in the recitation of mystic formulae, sacred dances and solitude. Among them were wandering mendicants, or dervishes, accredited with occult powers and the ability to perform marvellous feats, such as extinguishing fire on entering burning furnaces, engaging in ecstatic dances, howling and whirling and swallowing red-hot charcoal and eating live serpents. Since for the most part they were worthless beggars and scandalous fakirs, they brought discredit not only on their own organization but on Sufism generally.

Apart from these extravagances, however, in its original form Sufism was law-abiding, quietistic and mystical rather than tumultuous, fanatical and licentious. Under the influence of al-Ghazali (1058-1111), who combined the

theology of Ashari with Sufi mysticism, it became reconciled with the traditional faith and practice of Islam. But it was too far removed from Sunnite orthodoxy to be regarded with much favour in official circles and, while it has introduced a spiritual element that hitherto was lacking, it has steadily declined during the last century.

The strength and weakness of Islam has always been its intense conservatism. It is essentially the Religion of the Book and that Book is the Qur'an, transcribed from a tablet preserved in heaven and revealed to the Prophet once and for all time as literally the Word of God. Next to the sacred book is the *hadith*, and when these traditions have been duly authenticated they become virtually articles of faith and the basis of law and practice. There are Muslims, it is true, who are anxious to subject at any rate *hadith* to critical investigation like that applied by Christianity today to its scriptures. And in the past Islam has shown considerable powers of adaptation to different climates of thought. Reactionary forces, however, are firmly entrenched, and it cannot be denied that the stability of Islamic civilization has been preserved throughout the ages by its unfailing adherence to its fundamental doctrine of unconditional submission to the will and precepts of Allah as revealed by his prophet Muhammad.

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## CHAPTER VIII

# THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Now that the various forms which religion has taken all over the world from the Stone Age to the present day have been surveyed, the time has come to consider very briefly in conclusion how this mass of material should be studied to the best advantage. It has already been pointed out in the Preface that this book should be regarded as an introduction to a more intensive study of this very big subject. From the start, however, since the available data are so very varied in their nature and significance, it is most important that the evidence should be assessed correctly to avoid arriving at wrong conclusions and false interpretations. In few departments of knowledge is this danger more apparent and, therefore, great care is needed, not only in maintaining an objectivity proper to any scientific discipline, but also in the manner of approach to the different sources of information.

### **The Anthropological Approach**

Thus, as was explained in the opening chapter, it is no longer possible, especially in the early and more primitive phases of magico-religious belief and practice, to reconstruct orderly sequences "as distinctly stratified as the earth on which man lives", as E. B. Tylor declared at the end of the last century. Sir James Frazer made the same mistake in framing definitions and making classifications to cover the whole of magic and religion in terms of mental ages through which peoples all over the world in parallel states of culture were supposed to have passed at different periods, successive in time and progressive in development. On this hypothesis, present-day beliefs, customs and institutions were studied primarily as survivals or developments of the earlier and simpler forms which began in primitive

states of culture, but with little or no attempt to explain why some had continued and others had disappeared. It is true that Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889) had recognized the interrelation between religion, law and morality in ancient Greece and Rome, while Robertson Smith (1846-1894) had stressed the stabilizing influence of ritual on religion.

It was not until the beginning of the present century, however, that R. R. Marett asked the pertinent question, "How and why do survivals survive?" Although, like his predecessors, he retained the evolutionary outlook, without repudiating the study of origins he deprecated mere antiquarianism—"collecting odd bits of contemporary culture" which, he said, "seem to be more or less out of place in a so-called civilized world". "It is all too easy for the student of survivals", he continued, "to go on a wild-goose chase in search of an original meaning that never was." Relics of the past are "something more than obsolescent institutions and beliefs handed down from backward peoples". They have a "present value for old-fashioned minds", and to ignore this living function of theirs is to lose touch with that movement in history which can be studied here and now. Treated merely as a fossil, the survival can never be understood. Its meaning and significance can be perceived only when it is investigated and evaluated in its proper setting in the social and religious structure in which it occurs (*Psychology and Folk-Lore* (1920), pp. 13, 127).

The business of myth, for instance, is not to satisfy curiosity about the past but to confirm the established sacred and social orders and their fundamental beliefs and sanctions in the present. Like that of religion in general, its function is to restore confidence in crises and to maintain the stability of the existing régime. It is there, as Marett remarked in his Gifford Lectures at St. Andrews in 1931-1932, "to cater, not for the speculative man with his 'Why?', but for the practical man with his 'How, if not thus?' ". So far from magic being a pseudo-science, as Frazer imagined, it is a means of asserting optimism, of giving hope in the face of adversity, and of utilizing for the common weal its supernatural forces and sanctions to enable ill-provided human pilgrims to advance with confidence on life's

journey. In short, however institutions may have arisen and developed, it is possible to discover by a careful investigation of their actual function in a living community their value in supplying spiritual power to help and heal by means of faith, and to facilitate the living together of its members in an orderly arrangement of social relations, quite apart from the truth or falsity of the beliefs held and of the rites performed.

It is this "functional" approach to the intensive study of human society by carefully devised observational analytic inquiries in very limited areas that is the chief preoccupation of social anthropologists in this country today. Under the inspiration of the late Professors Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, since the middle twenties of this century a change in emphasis and purpose has been effected from generalized theoretical reconstructions of origins and developments to the particularized investigation of how religious and social organizations actually work in a given society and what they do for its members. In the light of their own field-studies—Malinowski among the Trobriand Islanders in Melanesia and Radcliffe-Brown in the Andaman Islands—they laid the foundations of what is really a specialized comparative sociology designed to determine the interrelations of the social, economic and religious behaviour of primitive peoples.

For Malinowski the essential factor was the satisfaction of man's biological needs—the reproduction of the species, the maintenance of the food supply, bodily comforts such as shelter, warmth, cleanliness and protection against dangers. As has already been suggested (Chap. I, p. 12), it has been around these primary requirements that religion has developed and functioned, and Malinowski has affirmed that "a sound social life must be based on a truly religious system of values, that is, one which reflects the revelation to us of the existence of spiritual and moral order". Radcliffe-Brown, on the other hand, like the French sociologist Durkheim before him, attached more importance to social facts and their functions as "the necessary conditions" of the life of a community. Here, again, it is true that the institutions of religion function

within the structure of society, be it a theocracy or church, as for example in the case of the divine kingship in Ancient Egypt, the covenant with Yahweh in Israel, or the papal jurisdiction in Western Christendom in the Middle Ages. Under these conditions, beliefs and practices have been a culturally determined means of maintaining and regulating human relationships and adjustments, and of stabilizing spiritual, moral, economic and political institutions based on religious sanctions.

In all states of culture an important function of religion has been to unite individuals and groups into stable social structures, regulating and consolidating the relations of their members one with another in a higher unity to preserve a state of equilibrium. It is also true that "biological needs" as "necessary conditions of existence" have been a determining factor, since these have been the emotional centres of myth and ritual throughout the ages. At all times, as we have seen, food and children and protection have been the primary needs of man, and around them the sense of sacredness and of dependence on forces and powers superior to man has found expression in an organized cultus that lies at the heart of religion and of the structure of society.

Therefore, there can be no doubt that this so-called functional approach to the study of primitive society and its religion has been highly illuminating, not least in respect of its field work and regional studies. Hitherto the only available information in this domain of inquiry was that collected by all and sundry regardless of their qualifications for such a highly technical task—medical men, missionaries, explorers, traders, administrators, and a few experts who might spend only a "long vacation" of about three months in the "field", relying as a rule solely on an interpreter for communication with the native population they were studying. Today a band of carefully trained and adequately equipped researchers are producing a steadily increasing volume of reliable and informed material based upon ascertained sociological theory and rules of procedure—that is to say, the investigation of hypotheses—as well as obtaining a record of field data.

For the purposes of a comparative sociology this is excellent and a great advance on the former general conclusions drawn from disparate phenomena haphazardly assembled and brought together on the principle of superficial resemblance, regardless of diversities, comparability and provenance, mainly for the purpose of establishing conjectural progressive developments. Nevertheless, as Professor Fortes, himself a functionalist, has pointed out, "the concept of evolution had a grandeur and sweep which gave a universal setting to the facts discovered by anthropologists. No frame of reference of equal philosophical magnitude and generality has been found to replace it in our thinking about human social life. To do so is one of the major tasks ahead".

Furthermore, a knowledge of the past, which hitherto has been one of the chief concerns of anthropology to elucidate, cannot be dismissed as irrelevant in the study of how institutions and organizations work in actual fact today, as Malinowski and others have maintained. "The fact that nineteenth-century anthropologists were uncritical in their reconstructions ought not to lead to the conclusion", as Professor Evans-Pritchard very truly says, "that all effort expended in this direction is a waste of time." Thus, in the study of religion, we cannot understand how a faith has fulfilled its purposes in giving stability to the structure of society, and met the spiritual needs of those who have practised it, without considering the way in which it has arisen and developed historically within its own environment and in its relations with the influence on other cultural values, such as art, literature, philosophical thought, and social, economic and political organization.

Even the native tribes of Australia, though they have been devoid of documentary records, have not been without some conception of history in the traditional sense. Thus, they have regarded their religious and social organization as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, because they have believed that the existing order was determined once and for all by their tribal ancestors in the Alcheringa, or Dream-time, of long ago, when these culture-heroes lived on the earth. In other words, the



structure of their society was laid in the remote past, so that for them the past has furnished the pattern they have seen at work in the present, and in turn the present has yielded them the perspective from which to view and understand the past. History, therefore, is an integral part of tribal tradition, and is operative in the religious and social life of primitive societies expressed in terms of their myth and ritual and the whole network of social relations.

In the higher religions this conception and function of history is fundamental. As we have seen, the faith once delivered through their founders, prophets and seers has acquired a permanent value and sanctity binding on subsequent generations by virtue of its alleged divine origins and decrees. Thus, "revealed truth" is accorded an absolute authority for those who accept its claims, and by its dictates belief and conduct are determined. Now it is true that regarded merely in terms of "function" the validity of such beliefs can be ignored, since as an integral part of the social machinery they may "work" for good or ill independent of their veracity in respect of intellectual and historical truth and reality. But supernatural authority as such can never be ultimately its own guarantee, and the claims on which it rests must be always in the last resort verifiable claims. The final appeal is to the historical, intellectual and spiritual content of the beliefs or institutions, as verifiable by history and rational inquiry, apart from whether or not the effects are socially valuable. Therefore, the student of the history of religions cannot be content with a purely functional approach, because so much of vital importance in the evaluation of the evidence he has to investigate depends on what lies behind the later developments, their claims and formulations.

In the Old Testament scriptures, for instance, the covenant between Israel and Yahweh is represented as going back beyond the time of Moses to the Patriarchal period in the days of Abraham, in which legend and history are so interwoven that only by a careful study of the various sources of information concerning the customs, beliefs, institutions and organization of the culture in which the Hebrew tribes lived and moved and had their being can

the tradition be evaluated, and the part it played in the consolidation of the nation be determined. For nowhere have the vicissitudes in the fortunes of a community had a more profound effect upon its religious thought and outlook, interpreted in terms of a God revealing himself in and through history. This conception of divine revelation can be understood and assessed only by a critical examination of all the available sources of information; namely, the oral tradition, the archaeological and epigraphic material, and finally the texts and documents of a comparatively late period.

### Archaeological Evidence

The deeper the roots of religion are laid in a pre-literary past, however, the more difficult and precarious it becomes to arrive at accurate conclusions in the study of their origins and developments. "If we work backwards from the present", as Marett opined, "traces of religion and all the major institutions of mankind persist until they fade out altogether precisely at the point at which Man himself fades out also." Thus, as we saw in the opening chapter, information concerning the dawn of religion in the Old Stone Age can be obtained only from prehistoric burials, cult objects, sculpture and paintings. These archaeological remains for the most part are confined to the Upper Palaeolithic, though there are traces of a cult of skulls in the Middle Pleistocene epoch in China some 400,000 years ago, long before Neanderthal Man began to bury his dead ceremonially during the Third Interglacial and the succeeding maximum Glaciation from 100,000 to 50,000 years ago. But it was not until some 30,000 years later, in the Upper Palaeolithic, that the decorated caves and plastic art, together with the more elaborate interments containing red ochre and shells as life-giving agents, have produced evidence of the cult of Early Man centred in the mysteries of propagation, birth, death and the means of subsistence. From this material some knowledge has been gained of human dependence upon a providential source of bounty and well-being, in addition to the cult of the dead, and of the ritual techniques that were employed in the

prehistoric sanctuaries and elsewhere for the purpose of sacralizing all the vital crises and significant events of human existence, encasing it in a sacramental framework.

It is against this Palaeolithic background that the subsequent developments have to be placed, especially in the Near East, where the ancient civilizations arose in which the higher living religions emerged. The Fertile Crescent was not only the cradleland of the civilizations of Egypt, Babylonia, Palestine and the adjacent regions, but from the culture of Elam and Mesopotamia that of the Indus valley, on which the religion of India was very largely based, was derived, while Crete, Greece and the Aegean were also closely related to western Asia. But even in this focus of civilization, where probably the art of writing was first invented, written records go back only some 5,000 years. Therefore we have to rely on archaeology to provide the evidence for those aspects of the history of religion for which there is no written history. This includes all that is not recorded in the documents, either before or after they were compiled. Moreover, these written records have come to light as a result of archaeological discoveries, while their decipherment has been dependent very largely upon the resources provided by systematic excavation coupled with strict adherence to modern philological method.

### The Documentary Evidence

One of the major results of archaeological research since the end of the last century has been the discovery of such records on papyrus rolls from Egypt and inscribed tablets from Mesopotamia going back to the third millennium B.C., while in the second millennium a wealth of archives has come to light in the ancient Hittite Empire at Boghaz-Keui in northern Cappadocia, at Ras Shamra in Syria, and various other sites in the Ancient Middle East, Crete and the Aegean. As a result it is now clear that writing for religious, business and literary purposes was well established by the middle of the second millennium B.C., and at first it would seem to have been essentially a priestly accomplishment.

### (a) The Egyptian Texts

In Ancient Egypt the Pyramid Texts represent a vast collection of sacred writings in a "hieroglyphic" script, so named because the signs were regarded as "sacred carvings", drawn from every available source from about 2980 to 2474 B.C. Their purpose was to give immortality to the pharaoh and so they were inscribed on the walls of royal tombs. Some refer to rites, and myths, others are in the nature of charms and prayers, the earliest of which may go back to predynastic times. In addition to these 1050 Pyramid Texts, when the hope of a life after death was extended to everybody, mortuary texts were written on the inside of coffins and on papyri (incorrectly called "The Book of the Dead"), deposited in the tomb so that for at least three thousand years the production of this type of sacred literature was a priestly occupation, the decipherment of which by Champollion in 1822, after the discovery of the Rosetta stone in 1799, has added enormously to our knowledge of, and sometimes confusion about, the religion of Ancient Egypt. Today any serious study of this aspect of the history of religion is bound to be based very largely on this documentary evidence.

### (b) Mesopotamian Texts

In Mesopotamia, again, the clay tablets inscribed with their wedged-shaped "cuneiform" characters, discovered in scores of thousands, have provided a wealth of data for the study of Sumerian and Babylonian religion since the problem of their decipherment was solved by Rawlinson, Oppert and Hincks between 1846 and 1855, despite their lack of philological training and method. Unlike the Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, which are concerned mainly with the cult of the dead, the cuneiform tablets are a mine of information about divination, astrology, ritual texts, myths, legends, lists of kings, legal procedure, contracts, administration and excerpts from political history. From them a fairly accurate knowledge of belief and practice in Mesopotamia can be obtained from about 3000 B.C., when the Sumerians invented the art of writing in their wedge-

shaped script with a stylus on clay tablets in an increasingly stylized form of the original pictographic signs. This remained, in fact, a sacred language until it fell into disuse at the beginning of the Christian era, and from the Sumerians and Accadians the writing and its literature passed to the Assyrians, the Hittites, the Mitannians and the Elamites.

Behind this diffusion there seems to have been an earlier type of cuneiform found on a proto-Elamite tablet at Susa, which belongs probably to the fourth millennium B.C. Indeed, cuneiform was employed to write many non-Semitic languages in the Ancient Near East, and some of the texts were transliterated in bilingual versions, Semitic and Sumerian (Accadian), thereby disclosing almost every aspect of contemporary learning, secular and sacred. For example, among the famous collection of texts in the great library at Nineveh, founded by Ashurbanipal at the end of the Assyrian Empire (668-626 B.C.), was the composite story of Gilgamesh, the legendary founder of the city of Erech, as a national epic in which the Tammuz theme, the deluge myth, necromancy and the cult of the dead were skilfully combined in 3,000 lines of text on twelve tablets. The final form was the product of a long and complicated literary process to give a particular meaning and purpose to the established cultus in relation to the burial of the dead and the Annual Festival.

### (c) **The Ras Shamra Texts**

The parallel literature, belonging to the fourteenth century B.C., discovered from 1929 onwards at Ras Shamra (Ugarit) on the Syrian coast is of very considerable importance, especially for students of the Hebrew documents, because the texts were written in cuneiform in an alphabetic Old Hebrew tongue, ancestral to Biblical Hebrew, and they afford first-hand information about the religion of the Canaanites at the time of the Israelite invasion of Palestine. Examples of the same kind of script have been found also at Beth Shemesh and Mount Tabor. At Tell-el-Amarna in Egypt, where the heretic pharaoh, Ikhnoton, established his capital in the fourteenth century, (Chap. II, pp. 38 f.), a quantity of letters written in

Accadian was discovered in 1887, to which others have been added in recent years. They, too, contained Canaanite glosses showing that the language of Palestine at that time was virtually Hebrew, whatever the Israelite tribes may have spoken before they settled in the country.

#### (d) The Hebrew Texts

The letters found at Lachish in 1935, among the debris of the last destruction of the city by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., were also written with a reed pen in Hebrew on scraps of pottery and addressed to the governor by the officer in charge of a garrison in the neighbourhood. They are, however, difficult to interpret and do not throw any light on the period before the end of the monarchy, or add to our knowledge of its history. This also applies to fragments of papyrus inscribed with the texts from the decalogue belonging to the second century B.C., and to the eight ancient scrolls first discovered in 1947 in a cave near the Dead Sea. These contain the book of Isaiah, the text of Habakkuk with a commentary, portions of the apocryphal writings known as Pseudepigrapha (cf. Chap. V, p. 129), and quotations from the Old Testament in the non-biblical scrolls.

The genuineness of these Dead Sea scrolls has been questioned and their date and significance are still in debate. It has been held that the contents of the cave belong to the later Hellenistic period (i.e. the end of the second century B.C.), apart from a few of the particles that were deposited there at the beginning of the Christian era. This, however, has yet to be established, and expert opinion remains divided between those who accept this earlier dating and those who place it much later. A fragment of linen, in which the copy of the book of Isaiah had been wrapped, was examined by the so-called Carbon-14 method for measuring the age of archaeological objects by the radio-activity of the carbon in them, yielded a reading of 1,917 years. The test, therefore, confirmed the antiquity of the scroll, suggesting that at least some of the documents cannot be much later than the end of the first century A.D. On the other hand, as they seem to have been the work of an unorthodox Jewish sect whose beliefs may have had

some affinities with the Karaites (cf. Chap. V, p. 136), who arose in Babylon in the latter part of the eighth century A.D., the problem of chronology is beset with difficulties. But whatever interpretation is placed upon these contentious scrolls, it seems that a standard form of the Hebrew text existed at the beginning of the Christian era, for the most part not so very different from that drawn up in the tenth century A.D. by the guild of scholars known as Massoretes, containing vowel points and accents to ensure correct pronunciation (i.e. the Massoretic text).

Among the collection of Greek papyri found in Egypt some years ago and purchased by Chester Beatty (cf. Chap. VII, p. 180), dating from the third century A.D., are some Old Testament texts together with two small fragments from the previous century. All of these show considerable diversity in the Septuagint (Greek) renderings of the pre-Christian Aramaic script. Indeed, the farther back we go the more fluid becomes the transmission, adapting itself to changing circumstances, theologies and linguistic requirements. For many centuries the scriptures were copied by hand and revised by editors, until in the tenth century the vowels were added in the production of the Massoretic text. Although the purpose was to give greater precision in interpretation as well as in pronunciation, we cannot be sure it was the one originally intended by the writer. Therefore, while the documentary evidence is of very great interest to the biblical student, it is much too late to be relevant to the problem of the historicity of the events recorded in the narratives. For the historian the issue depends upon the reconstruction of the long and chequered history of the Hebrew literature, so that he may start with definite hypotheses concerning the age and value of the documents at his disposal.

There is, in fact, not a single book in the Old Testament that was written in the first instance in the form in which it now appears in the Hebrew scriptures. Even the prophets did not compile the works attributed to them, though Jeremiah collected his oracles, and where he is represented as speaking in the first person it is at least possible that he

may have dictated his visions to Baruch the scribe (cf. Jer. xxxvi.). A number of books containing prophetic oracles appear to have been in circulation, like "the visions of Iddo the seer" and the oracles of Nathan and Abijah of Shiloh, mentioned casually in 2 Chronicles ix. 29, from which extracts may have been made and incorporated in the later literature in the fourth century B.C. by editors who used a variety of sources in drawing up their books, and assigning them to individual prophets who had lived in the eighth century B.C. and onwards (Amos *c.* 760 B.C.; Isaiah 740-700; Jeremiah 626-586; Deutero-Isaiah in the middle of the sixth century; Haggai 520-516 and Malachi *c.* 450). The divine message they proclaimed was inherited tradition believed to reach back to Moses and the Patriarchs, as recorded in the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, which were thought to have been the work of Moses.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, when it became clear that the cosmology in the Genesis creation stories could not be reconciled with scientific evidence concerning the origin and development of the solar system and the evolutionary process, attention was concentrated upon the nature of the narratives. As a result, the composite structure not only of these stories but of the entire Pentateuch was soon discerned. This led to the framing of the four-document hypothesis by Graf and Wellhausen in the sixties of the last century, with two narratives (J and E) composed about the ninth century B.C. in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel respectively, the Priestly Code (P) in the time of Ezra after the Exile (*c.* 398 B.C.), and the book of Deuteronomy (D), an independent document based on the teaching of the eighth-century prophets (cf. Chap. II, pp. 55 f.). While this literary analysis has undergone considerable revision, elaboration, subdivision and now repudiation by some critics, it is generally agreed that underlying all the various sources and fragments there are earlier traditions, partly literary and partly oral, which existed in a fluid state before any attempts were made to bring them together in the form of continuous narratives. Therefore, here, again, we are brought back in the last analysis to a



pre-literary epoch in which we have to rely on tradition and archaeology for the interpretation of the contents of the documentary evidence, very much as in pre-Homeric Greece where our knowledge of the ancient civilization of Crete and the Aegean and their religion comes from archaeological sources.

#### (e) The New Testament

Similarly in Christianity, as we have seen, the teaching of Christ was committed to memory by his followers and proclaimed in the form of *kerygma* and *didache* before the Gospel tradition was compiled (Chap. VII, p. 178). Although the New Testament was composed within the second half of the first century A.D., none of the books was written by any of the original Twelve Apostles, though some of the authors were intimately acquainted with them and with St. Paul (e.g. St. Mark and St. Luke). Since apart from the fragment of the Fourth Gospel belonging to the second century, already described, it is only from the quotations in the writings of the Christian Fathers of this period (i.e. Irenaeus, Origen and Tertullian) that documentary material is available prior to the papyrus manuscripts of the third and fourth centuries, to discover the original sources, recourse has to be made to literary and historical research in the oral forms of the tradition brought into relation with the apostolic interpretations of the underlying historical events. Nevertheless, as Harnack, the eminent German authority on the history of the Early Church and Biblical criticism, declared in 1897 in the preface to his great work on the chronology of the ancient literature, "in all main points, and in most details, the earliest literature of the Church is, from a literary-historical point of view, trustworthy and dependable. . . . The chronological framework in which the tradition has arranged the documents is, in all the principal points, from the Pauline Epistles to Irenaeus, correct and compels the historian to abandon all hypotheses with relation to the historical course of things that are inconsistent with this framework".

*(f)* **The Qur'an**

In Islam, although Muhammad is said to have been illiterate, some of the suras or chapters of the Qur'an were written down by his secretaries during the lifetime of the Prophet in a haphazard manner on palm leaves, stones and the shoulder-blades of animals. New chapters were added from time to time, and as the record grew it was memorized by his followers. After his death the material was collected and edited by Zayd ibn Thabit, under the direction of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, and his successor, Omar, and bequeathed to Hafsa, one of Muhammad's widows. Four other editions were produced, giving different readings of the text, thereby causing strife and confusion in their interpretation. As this controversy was harmful to the stability of the faith, a commission was appointed by Otham to prepare a single authorized version which has become binding on all Muslims to this day.

The textual history of the Qur'an, therefore, is not very different from that of the Bible, except that no serious attempt has been made to subject its contents to a critical examination and to arrange them in a chronological sequence. Like those of the Hebrew prophets and of Christ, the original utterances of Muhammad probably were short sayings which subsequently were recorded in writing and accorded divine authority. But by arranging the 114 chapters, with the exception of the first chapter, in relation to their length, beginning with the longest and ending with the shortest, the historical order has been completely abandoned. Moreover, the short verses, often the earliest in date and belonging to the Mecca period, were combined with those delivered at Medina later. In the earliest communications in rhymed prose, the references to current events and historical situations are few, which makes precise dating difficult. The later Medina section, written in heavy prose with a wearisome repetition of stock phrases, deals mainly with administration, contemporary occurrences and the denunciation of enemies. As the history of this period is well known, the dating becomes easier, but the problem is complicated by the inclusion of verses spoken at Medina.

in chapters which begin in Mecca. Furthermore, the readings in the various manuscripts differ considerably, and until these have been collated an accurate estimate of the contents cannot be determined. Whole verses were revoked or "abrogated" by later revelations (cf. II. 100, XVI. 103 ff.) so that, for example, whereas the Jews, Christians and Sabaeans at first were said to be justified in the next world as believers in God (V. 73), subsequently it was declared that God would decide between them on the resurrection day (XXII. 17).

For the purposes of recitation in the mosques the Qur'an is divided into sixty sections, or thirty equal parts, each subdivided into a number of prostrations. Indeed, since it was to be recited as the living voice of God speaking through his prophet rather than to be read as "lessons" from holy scripture, no attempt was made to produce an orderly literary document. Therefore, it consisted of short prosaic sentences joined together to make chapters easily spoken, especially in the earlier rhyming verses, and expanded to meet the growing needs by constant if not always very consistent editing and amplification. Having been designed for the purposes of religion in practice, based on the doctrine of verbal inspiration, the unravelling and correct dating of its several parts is a very difficult and complicated task, often, in fact, impossible to achieve. It should be studied, therefore, essentially as a sacred book giving utterance to deep religious convictions like those set forth in the prophetic literature of Israel.

### (g) The Veda

In the oriental religions, on the other hand, the absence of any conception of divine revelation as the self-disclosure of the will and purposes of a personal God recorded in scriptures, as in Islam, Judaism and Christianity, places their sacred literature in a different category. Thus, in India, the Veda primarily consists of four collections of texts (i.e. *samhitas*) comprising hymns, chants, prayers, formulae, prose-works and magical rites for public and private use by the Brahmins in the performance of their priestly functions. This sacred "knowledge" (*veda*) is

divided into that which has been "heard" (*scruti*) or revealed through inspired seers (*rishis*) as magical "words of power" (cf. Chap. III, pp. 71 f.), and that which has been remembered (*smriti*) and so has acquired the status of tradition. To the first of these two sections the ten books of the Rig-veda belonged, and so sacred were they that they were not written down for several centuries, lest some unauthorized person should get hold of them. They were therefore kept in secret by the priests as an integral part of Brahmanic esoteric knowledge; not as revealed truth but because sacred power resided in them.

For the study of the history of religion their value lies chiefly in what can be learnt from them about the Vedic gods and the Soma-sacrifice. Since they were collected about 1000 B.C. and must have been composed several centuries earlier, they are also of interest and importance as being among the oldest records of sacred texts in the world, and throwing light on the tribal and religious organization of the Aryan invaders of India in the second millennium B.C. Supplementing the Rig-veda is the rather later collection of hymns and spells known as the Atharva-veda which balances the picture by showing that in addition to the beneficent powers like Indra, Agni, Varuna and Soma, revealed in the Rig-veda, there were also malevolent forces, the evil influences of which had to be thwarted by spells and incantations and other magical devices recorded in these texts.

As the sacred literature accumulated it became the duty of the priesthood to apply its superior knowledge to the ordering of the sacrificial system on which the entire universe and the gods depended. Thus, to explain the relationship of the Vedic texts to this elaborate ceremonial, the Brahmanas were drawn up from about 700 B.C. and attached to the earlier *Samhitas* (collections of texts) to explain their significance in the Brahmanic ritual. As the rites acquired a mystic interpretation in relation to the all-comprehending first principle behind and above the gods and within the whole phenomenal world of appearances, gradually the Brahmanas merged into the philosophical treatises called the Upanishads.

The earliest of these Upanishadic writings were composed between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C., but their contents in the first instance were orally transmitted and memorized before they were written in archaic prose. Furthermore, as they proceeded from individual "forest" teachers and from schools of ascetic mysticism, they do not contain consistent or systematized thought and teaching, though the fundamental conception is that of Brahman as the sole ground of all existence of which the human self (Atman) is a part destined to be absorbed into the whole (cf. Chap. III, pp. 72 f.). The extant manuscripts, like those of all the Vedas, are later than A.D. 1300 in date, and it was not until the rise of the philosophical schools at the beginning of the Christian era that commentators produced *sutras*, or collections of aphorisms, and summed up the doctrines of the Upanishads as Vedanta (i.e. "the End of the Vedas").

The commentaries of Sankara, who lived about the eighth century A.D., are very useful for the determination of the Upanishadic texts, but very different interpretations of their contents are found in those of other schools of thought, such as the commentaries of Ramanuja or Madhva. The Upanishads themselves are attached to the Vedic canon (i.e. the Rig-veda, the Soma-veda, and the Yajur-veda), and notably to the Atharva-veda, in order to give them canonical authority, unlike the composite and all-embracing Gita which, despite its widespread appeal, is regarded by many Hindu theologians as tradition (*smṛiti*) rather than inspired revelation (*śruti*).

#### (h) Buddhist Texts

Although the Buddha wrote nothing, and none of his teaching was recorded for at least four hundred years after his death, the canonical literature of Buddhism is so immense that even the monks themselves, who devote their life to its study, cannot hope to be able to become acquainted with the whole of it. For practical purposes it must suffice to concentrate attention on a particular section of the texts, such as, for instance, the Pali literature known as the Tripitaka, or "Three Baskets", each containing a

set of manuscripts. These fall into three main groups—the *Vinaya Pitaka* of the monastic rules; the *Sutta Pitaka* of sermons, sayings and dialogues attributed to the Buddha and his disciples in the form of instructions concerning the practice of Buddhism; and, finally, the *Abhidharma Pitaka*, with its long and complicated philosophical, ethical and psychological discourses.

In their oldest form they were written in Pali, an early form of Sanskrit used as the sacred language in which the Theravada school compiled its scriptures in Northern India. These are now preserved in Ceylon, Burma and Siam, but to what extent they have retained their original form it is impossible to say. The literature was translated into many languages as Buddhism spread over Asia, and was constantly undergoing expansion and rearrangement as supplementary material was added to it. The Pali Text Society has published most of the texts, and Mrs. Rhys Davids tried to extract from the Pali Canon the original teaching of the Buddha, and to represent it as having been given in a more positive form than that in which it has been handed down in the records. But although oral tradition cannot be lightly dismissed, as we have seen on so many occasions, especially when it is passed on through the remarkable memories of oriental transmitters, nevertheless, when an interval of four hundred years has elapsed before the words of a Founder were written down, their accuracy and original significance must always be open to doubt. The Canon was fixed in the third century B.C., and the *Sutta Pitaka* had been by then separated into five collections, or *Nikaya*, but it was not until about 20 B.C. that they were written down in books.<sup>1</sup>

In Northern Buddhism the Mahayana Canon rapidly increased and assumed gigantic proportions, exceeding in extent the sacred literature of any other religion. Only a small portion of the Chinese and Tibetan Tripitaka has

<sup>1</sup> Since the first of the canonical books to be translated (in 1815) was an anthology of Buddhist sayings emphasizing the pathos of life in this world—the *Dhammapada*—its influence on the negative side of the teaching of Buddhism has been considerable, having been widely read in the West.

been translated into English, but an exhaustive catalogue, translated by Bunyiu Nanjio in 1883, contains 1662 works divided into the "Three Baskets", both Hinayana and Mahayana, and miscellaneous writings. The most important of these documents are the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra*. The Diamond Sutra—which incidentally is the oldest surviving printed book, bearing on its frontispiece the date A.D. 868 and comprising a scroll sixteen feet in length, now in the British Museum—is a doctrinal treatise translated into Chinese during the period A.D. 384 to 417. *The Lotus of the True Law* probably dates from about A.D. 200, and was translated into Chinese between 265 and 316. This is the best known of the Mahayana works, purporting to be a discourse delivered by Gautama to Bodhisattvas. It is divided into two parts, the second of which (Chaps. 21–26) is a later addition of spells and mythological stories. The eternity of the Buddha is maintained and the miraculous element in it is very prominent. In the English translation by Kern, its poetic diction, which in the original is of high quality, has suffered considerably.

### (i) Chinese Texts

Although China had a well-developed system of writing in the second millennium B.C., it remained a sacred art for a thousand years. When Confucius, according to tradition, set to work to produce a literature in 485 B.C., he (or whoever in fact was responsible for it) was mainly concerned with the annotation of existing annals and records (cf. Chap. IV, pp. 101 f.). The most authoritative collections of the sayings of Confucius, called *Lun Yü* or the Analects, is that compiled by pupils of his first followers and written apparently about 400 B.C. A manuscript of the work was discovered in the house of the sage in 150 B.C., and may have been hidden away there in the previous century when Shih Huang Ti was endeavouring to destroy all the classical writings. Although less than half of it is good second-hand evidence, it appears to have been among the first of his sayings to have been written down and arranged to give emphasis to the various aspects of his teaching in which the groups concerned were especially interested. Since it is the

most authentic source we have of his life and teaching, a study of one of the several translations of the Analects is the best approach to Confucianism before proceeding to the rest of the literature, which has been briefly outlined (Chap. IV, pp. 101 f.).

Similarly, the *Tao Te Ching* is the most important literary source for early Taoism, in all probability embodying in neat epigrammatic verse the original teachings of the movement (*op. cit.*, p. 104). Its date is as uncertain as is the identity of its author, and like the Analects it is a composite work, containing early fragments embedded in later contexts, produced perhaps as a text-book for the instruction of would-be converts, though it is written in the form of mystical poetry in about five thousand Chinese characters. The first part is concerned with the *Tao* (Chaps. 1-37), and the second with *Te* (Chaps. 38-81), the power or "virtue" of the hidden mystery of the universe of which *Tao* is the "way". A second book, bearing the name of *Chuang Tzu*, who lived, it is thought, about 369-286 B.C., is a corpus of Taoist doctrinal writings, setting forth in thirty-three chapters a philosophy of individual freedom from the trammels of the world and society with such literary skill that it has acquired a recognized status in Chinese literature. But none of the sages in China, or the schools of thought they inspired, created sacred scriptures in any sense comparable to those of the great revealed religions in the West, or, indeed, a mystical literature of the kind we get in the Upanishads.

### (j) The Avesta

The collection of Zoroastrian writings in Old Iranian which has become known as the Zend-Avesta ("Text and Commentary"), occupy an intermediate position between the oriental and the occidental texts, in so far as the sacred books are specifically religious treaties with a Vedic background and a theistic outlook compiled over a considerable period of time in a dead language from oral tradition. Although, as has been explained (Chap. V, p. 116), some of the *Gathas*, or hymns, in the first part (i.e. the *Yasna*), written in an older dialect, may have been con-



temporary with Zarathushtra, it was not until the fourth century A.D. that the composition and redaction of the rest of the Avesta were completed in a later form of "Avestan" language. About this time another version was composed in a Middle Persian tongue known as Pahlavi, and revised in the sixth century. To this was added an extensive literature consisting of a collection of prayers, formulae and invocations (the *Vispered*); hymns of praise (the *Yashts*); legalistic and ritualistic injunctions, purifications and protective spells (the *Vendidad* or *Vivevdad*); and a book of rituals (the *Nirangistan*), together with a number of minor texts containing calendrical prayers and invocations, and a description of the fate of the soul after death. The earliest manuscripts now in existence may be one of the *Vispered* dated A.D. 1278, and two of the *Yasna* (A.D. 1323). In the absence of any critical analysis of the Avesta, the history of the text can be determined only with very great difficulty, since so much reliance has to be placed on oral transmission, changes in language and indirect evidence.

In its present form, as still used by Parsis as their Bible and Prayer Book, the documents represent only a small proportion of the original Avesta, which is said to have comprised 21 treatises (*nasks*), of which the *Vendidad* alone is alleged to have survived. This tradition doubtless points to there having been a much more extensive literature in former times, to which reference is frequently made in the Pahlavi *Bundahish*, the cosmological treatise dating from the ninth century A.D. (cf. Chap. IV, pp. 120 f.), and contemporary with the *Denkard* ("Acts of Religion"), the chief source of our knowledge of Zoroastrianism in the Sassanian period in the fourth century A.D., and what lies behind it.

It is generally agreed that only a fragment of the original texts survived the destruction of the books by Alexander the Great and the suppression of the faith in the succeeding centuries. All that remained were a few scattered works and that which had been committed to memory by the priests, until an attempt was made to collect such parts as survived in the third century A.D. Subse-

quently all the extant books and the oral tradition were rendered into the current Pahlavi under the Sassanians. Then followed the second attack under Muslim and Tartar rule which drove the majority of Zoroastrians into exile, or caused most of those who remained in Persia to abandon their faith, with the result that only a small part of the texts escaped destruction. It is this fragment that constitutes the Avesta as we have it today.

Therefore, the manuscripts are comparatively of recent compilation (i.e. thirteenth century A.D.), and in view of the chequered history of the literature the text must have been corrupted by continual re-translation, editing, interpretation and rendering into liturgical forms like the *Yasna*, in which the *Gathas*, in a more archaic language, are embedded. Some of the transcripts, in fact, were made as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As it now exists the Avesta is divided into two sections: (1) the liturgical works (i.e. *Vendidad*, *Vispered* and *Yasna*), and (2) the minor texts and the *Yashts*, known as the "Little Avesta", constituting the service-book for the laity. The language, called "Avestan", is closely allied to Sanskrit, and translation has now made the literature readily accessible for a documentary investigation of this very significant religious movement. Behind the texts lies a long pre-literary period, though some of the utterances of Zarathushtra may have been preserved in the *Gathas*.

### The Comparative Study of the History of Religions

While the student of the history of religions must concentrate attention on the written records when and where they exist, it is clear that he cannot afford to ignore the oral tradition in which the roots of the later growths are so deeply embedded. It is here that the anthropological approach and the archaeological data are very important for his purposes. But, unlike the comparative sociologist, he cannot dismiss as irrelevant a historical inquiry in dealing with this evidence. For him it is not merely a question of how religion works in specific cultures and societies. His concern is rather to discover how, after having fulfilled their functions under one set of social conditions, the beliefs

and institutions have undergone a process of development and adaptation to meet the fundamental needs of an ever-changing spiritual climate and cultural environment, and so have acquired a deeper significance and evaluation while still preserving their original essential content. This is most apparent in the case of those religions which have been established by a historic Founder, or claimed to have received divine sanction or revelation in the past which is still operative in the present.

But even when a particular faith bases itself firmly on a historical foundation in a person or event in time and space, it cannot be studied in isolation as an autonomous reality confined to a single tradition and environment. One has only to turn to the ancient Near East for an example of the way in which different religions and cultures interacted and contributed elements to one another, until at the beginning of the present era Christianity arose as a unifying spiritual dynamic which owed much not only to Judaism, but also to the other religious influences of the Near East—Hellenistic, Iranian and Neoplatonic—in which it emerged. Six centuries later the same process recurred in Arabia with the rise of Islam as the consolidating force of a new civilization, destined to become a widespread movement establishing a number of cultural relationships in different parts of the world. Similarly, in China and Japan, Mahayana Buddhism, by adapting itself to its new surroundings and the indigenous religions, exercised an integrative influence in an alien environment.

To understand how all this has been accomplished and what is its significance, the religions of the world must be studied comparatively, historically and objectively to co-ordinate the data, establish the relationships between the different systems, classifying them under types, and, when possible, to work out a chronological sequence in their development, distinguishing the elements that have proved to be permanently valuable from those aspects that have been transitory and ephemeral. Each religion should be studied in its own environment along these lines with a view to determining its function, meaning and values, not only within its own tradition and spheres of influence but also

to ascertain the light that such an investigation may throw on religious phenomena as a whole.

On the continent in recent years a school of thought has arisen under the name of "Phenomenology" devoting itself to the determination of the meaning of what has happened in history. The term has been adopted from that given by Husserl and his followers at the end of the last century to a philosophical theory of the validity of human knowledge. It is used, however, in a different sense in this connexion, being applied to the investigation of the structure and significance of religious phenomena, independently of their place in a particular cultural setting at a particular time. The material is collected from all ages, states of culture and parts of the world, regardless of chronology, environment, function in society or validity. It is considered solely as it is presented to the mind, and so restricts itself to pure description without making any attempt to pass judgment on what "appears". Thus, since God does not in this comprehensible manner appear, phenomenology is non-theistic in a philosophical or theological sense. It knows nothing of Deity as either subject or object. In short, it does not concern itself with the question of the truth of religion. That is the business of theology and philosophy. Its aim is to understand the religious fact as it appears to the religious man and how he reacts to it, rather than to try to determine the actual reality itself in its essential nature and being.

Primarily it is a method of inquiry to assess the meaning and significance of religious phenomena. As such it can be applied to each and every study of the history of religions, even though it may claim to be an independent scientific approach. History cannot be separated from life in the present because present and past are essential parts of an organic whole. What is called Phenomenology depends on a study of the history of religions for its material and is conditioned by the results of historical research, so that the interior religious experience and the exterior manifestations of the phenomena are really complementary aspects of one and the same discipline, necessary to one another and to be studied in conjunction with each other.

This applies also to theology. Whether or not Jesus was in fact the Christ of God, or Muhammad was the Prophet of Allah *par excellence*, is a question of faith and theology and "interior experience", not of historical and scientific determination. Nevertheless, the demonstration of the alleged unique character of the Biblical or Qur'anic revelations which find their climax respectively in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation or the Islamic confession of faith (*shahada*), depends very largely on the data supplied by the comparative study of the history and content of the relevant religions and what lies behind them. Before these facts can be interpreted and theologically evaluated in terms of their ultimate meaning and validity as divine realities, they must be ascertained and investigated objectively, historically and scientifically if they are to carry any rational conviction and the rival claims for the two revelations are to be duly assessed. Islam, Christianity and Judaism all maintain that they are in possession of a special self-disclosure of the Deity through their respective divinely appointed channels. The grounds on which these contentions are based demand validation by an impartial comparative examination of the relevant evidence.

As the name suggests, theology (*theos*, "God"; *logos*, "Word") is the "science of God" in the widest sense, including not only his essential nature and being but also his relations with the world and mankind. As such it can hardly be strictly a scientific discipline since it is based not only on the assumption of divine reality but also in practice on certain predetermined interpretations of the reality. Thus, Christian theologians normally start with the conviction that there can be no advance on the revelation fully given in the life and teaching of Christ as the Incarnate Lord from heaven, their task being to render what has been disclosed more explicit. Their Muslim and Jewish opposite numbers proceed along the same lines in respect of their final terms of reference, as do their Vedic counterparts in India, though, in the absence of a self-revealing living God in the Western sense, much greater latitude is exercised in the interpretations of their concepts of Ultimate Reality.

The student of the history and comparative science of

religion, on the other hand, like any other historian, anthropologist or literary critic, subjects the available data to a critical and impartial examination regardless of the implications of his inquiry for any particular set of doctrines and dictums, such as those of established theologies, political ideologies, or, indeed, of scientific hypotheses, which can be no less dogmatic. He is committed to the scientific, comparative and historical approach. Nevertheless, it not infrequently happens that he is also a member of a Faculty of Theology in a University, or in the case of the general reader he may be a practising member of some religious community. Then he is able to bring to the discipline an inner experience and understanding of religion from the theological standpoint, with its own scale of values and realities, together with an insight into the religious way of life based on personal convictions and a living faith.

To know what the deep things of the human spirit mean for oneself, whatever one's spiritual allegiance and tradition may be, makes it possible to understand in the light of one's own experience what these realities and values mean for others, provided, of course, that a universal religious consciousness is recognized as the common possession of all human beings by virtue of their spiritual endowment, enabling them to "bring forth the fruits of the spirit" according to their lights. Thus, although he himself was unable to accept any revealed religion, Malinowski maintained that "the comparative science of religion compels us to recognize religion as the master-force of human culture. Religion makes man do the biggest things he is capable of, and it does for man what nothing else can do; it gives him peace and happiness, harmony and a sense of purpose; and it gives all this in an absolute form". Behind all religion there are certain basic common principles. What these are, and how they have developed and become differentiated in a living tradition, can be determined and evaluated most effectively by a comparative and historical study carried out in a scientific and understanding spirit.

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